

Vol. 59

Religions
and Discourse

Evangelia Sembou (ed.)

The Young Hegel and Religion

Peter Lang

Religions and Discourse

This edited collection of essays aims to acquaint the reader with different aspects and readings of Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*. These writings consist of five essays plus some unfinished manuscripts, unpublished by Hegel himself during his lifetime and compiled by Herman Nohl as *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften* in 1907. This is the first such edited collection on these writings and will make an important contribution to Hegel scholarship.

The volume begins with an introduction on the intellectual background and an account of the *Early Theological Writings*. This is followed by a number of essays by both emerging and established scholars working in an international context. The essays offer a critical and/or interpretative approach to the aforesaid writings.

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The Young Hegel and Religion

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Edited by James M. M. Francis

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Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017933513

ISSN 1422-8998

ISBN 978-1-78707-502-3 (print) • ISBN 978-1-78707-503-0 (ePDF)

ISBN 978-1-78707-504-7 (ePub) • ISBN 978-1-78707-505-4 (mobi)

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Published by Peter Lang Ltd, International Academic Publishers,
52 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LU, United Kingdom
oxford@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com

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This publication has been peer reviewed.

Printed in Germany

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr James Francis, the series editor, for accepting this collection as part of Peter Lang's "Religions and Discourse" series. I am also grateful to Jasmin Allousch, programme assistant, Emma Clarke, assistant editor, Alice Emmott, editorial assistant, and Lucy Melville, publishing director, at Peter Lang for their assistance. The index was prepared by David Rudeforth.

Introduction

This volume contains chapters by a group of scholars on Hegel's *Theologische Jugendschriften*. I decided to pursue this project because, so far, no edited collection has appeared on Hegel's juvenilia. Therefore, the book will, I hope, fill a gap in the literature on Hegel, in general, the young Hegel, in particular.

Mikkel Flohr concentrates on "The Tübingen Fragment" in Chapter 1. In particular, he focuses on the idea of "popular religion" (*Volksreligion*), which, Flohr argues, Hegel uses in order to both illustrate and criticize Kant's moral philosophy. "Popular religion" is a "subjective religion", that is, a living set of principles which inform all human life and conduct. "Popular religion" is also the vehicle for the general education of humankind. In challenging Kant's dualism, popular religion contributes to a shift from Kant's moral philosophy to normative social theory.

In Chapter 2, Domagoj Vujeva deals with Hegel's critique of Christianity, while problematizing the republican character of his early political theory. Christianity lost its initial pure character when it became institutionalized as a state religion. As a state religion, Christianity ceased to be a religion of moral teaching. Hegel's republicanism is inspired by Greek antiquity, specifically the *poleis* as ethico-political communities wherein human freedom thrived. For Hegel, the modern phenomena of individualism, private property and social differentiation are due to the disintegration of these ethico-political communities. In this way, Hegel contrasts antiquity to modern times.

In Chapter 3, María del Rosario Acosta López addresses the relation between abstraction and violence through an in-depth analysis of the concept of "positivity" in Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*. The author argues that, "in his development of the notion of the positivity of religion in his Tübingen, Bern and Frankfurt periods, Hegel produces powerful

philosophical tools” for understanding the two kinds of violence “that result from the immediate (positive) translation of abstract forms of thought into concrete historical realities” (p. 94). Having demonstrated that these two kinds of violence are initially *formally* delineated in Hegel’s definition and analysis of the concept of “positivity”, López turns to the way in which they acquire a concrete ethico-political meaning in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”. Hegel’s criticism of the violence of law offers a useful analysis of the forms of historical violence that stem from a modern interpretation of the notion of “sovereignty”.

Peter Wake’s contribution in Chapter 4 first discusses Hegel’s rupture with Kantianism that is anticipated in “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay and that comes out fully blown in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay. He suggests that “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay is best read in terms of a tension that is latent between (a) Hegel’s early Kantianism that aspired to establish a religious form that would bridge the gap between the human capacity for rational self-determination and its concrete realization, and (b) his commitment to an ideal of unification in beauty which he owes to the notion of “folk-religion”, itself based on his ideal of the ancient Greek community. Wake’s contention is that the young Hegel aspires to a form of “immanent transcendence” that leads him to a break with Kantian practical philosophy.

In Chapter 5, W. Clark Wolf examines the role of the “concept” in Hegel’s *Early Theological Writings*, especially in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay. Specifically, the young Hegel sets up the “concept” as the universal element in law and opposes it to “life” and “reality”. “Reconcilability” marks Hegel’s articulation of an ethics beyond law, where “life” overcomes the “concept”. In “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay Hegel, Wolf argues, uses a post-Pauline opposition of law and life.

In Chapter 6, Venanzio Raspa shows that the Hegelian concept of “contradiction” has an historical and practical origin; it is also related to the terms of “split” (“*Entzweiung*”) and “opposition” (“*Gegensatz*”). Raspa offers an analysis on three levels: theoretical, historical and political-cultural. He argues that, by using the concepts of “love” and “life” that are playing a central role in the Frankfurt period, the young Hegel attempts to provide an explanation of the unification of opposites as well as to develop

a dialectical thinking. In the “Fragment of a System of 1800” he starts to use the concept of “contradiction” in order to express complex realities.

Finally, I consider the elements of Greek thought in the *Early Theological Writings* in Chapter 7. I start with “The Tübingen Essay of 1793” and the notion of folk-religion, that is, a public religion. In “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay we also read that the Germans once had a folk-religion, which died out as Christianity expanded. In “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay we encounter the Greek notion of “punishment as fate”. In addition, we encounter Platonism in the religious teaching of Jesus. The young Hegel refers to Plato’s theories of Forms and *anamnesis* when he explains how this immediate unity with God is lost once a person is born.

Here I will offer a short introduction on the intellectual background to these writings, as well as an account of the writings themselves.

Intellectual Background

An excellent account of Hegel’s intellectual background is offered by Dieter Heinrich.¹ Hegel studied theology at the University of Tübingen. It was his father’s wish that he study at the Tübingen Stift, a theological seminary whose mission was to educate and prepare young men either for ministry in the Church (as Lutheran pastors) or for public office in the duchy of Württemberg.

The ambience of the Tübingen Stift was to have a lasting influence on the young Hegel, as it did on his fellow students. The Stift was a very conservative institution and was organized in accordance with strict rules;

1 D. Heinrich, “Some Historical Presuppositions of Hegel’s System”, in D. E. Christensen (ed.), *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion. The Wofford Symposium: In Celebration of the Bi-centennial of the Birth of Hegel, 1970* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), pp. 25–44.

it was criticized for its rigid structure and repressive atmosphere as unique in its time by a Prussian academic inspector, whose job was to visit universities and report on their activities.² Hegel was at the Stift from 1788 to 1793. The repression was felt even more strongly by the students, given that in 1789 the Revolution had taken place in France and a new age had begun. After the French Revolution the world would not be the same again. The Revolution had led to the collapse of the Ancien Régime and had sent shockwaves across Europe. Young students at the Stift were enthusiastic about these developments; they endorsed the spirit of freedom of the times and opposed the authoritarianism of the seminary. Not only did they feel the repression of the strict rules which organized their lives at the Stift, they also disliked the theology they were taught there. This was the theology of Gottlob Christian Storr, who held the theological chair at the Stift. Storr used Kant's philosophy in order to defend Church doctrine. Kant accorded the human mind (i.e. understanding) an *active* role in the *constitution* of reality. The understanding subsumed the manifold of sensible intuition under concepts (categories).³ Kant accepted the empiricist view that our knowledge of reality is to some extent caused by the objects which affect us. But he also believed that our conception of reality is constituted by the faculty of the understanding, so that what we know is not just the sensations caused in us by objects, rather the objects as *we* constitute them *for ourselves* through concepts.⁴ It followed that we cannot know what is beyond experience. Now, Storr argued, if, as Kant says, we cannot grasp what is beyond experience – namely, God –, then we should allow room for faith and revelation. Thus, Storr defended doctrinal authority. Storr's theology dominated the curriculum at the Stift; and, in fact, Storr's reputation as a scholar had spread beyond the walls of the seminary. However, despite Storr's influence, at the Stift there was also a devil called Immanuel

2 Heinrich, "Some Historical Presuppositions of Hegel's System", p. 34.

3 I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by N. K. Smith as *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929), p. 156.

4 *Ibid.* pp. 41–42. See also "the understanding ... is itself the lawgiver of nature. Save through it, nature, that is, synthetic unity of the manifold of appearances according to rules, would not exist at all." *Ibid.* p. 148.

Diez. Diez was a tutor there and his task was to help students with their theological studies. Actually, Diez was “the most radical Kantian ever to have tutored at a university.”⁵ He used the spirit of Kantianism in order to direct a polemic against Christian dogmatism and Storr’s theology. Like Storr, he started from Kant’s critical philosophy; but, whereas Storr had used it to argue in favour of belief in revelation, Diez used it to criticize dogmatics. If, as Kant says, our concepts that go beyond experience lead us to transcendental illusions, then we cannot say anything about God and the supernatural. For this reason he characterized Storr’s theology as “transcendental illusion and empty chimeras.”⁶ Moreover, for Diez:

Christ and his apostles, believing they have insight into a realm of spirits, are phantasists; those who believe them, all theologians and the whole Christian flock, are lost in superstition.⁷

Diez would go so far as to dub Christ a fraud.⁸ As a matter of fact, Diez was careful and would mount his polemic only among friends. And, although many of his friends would oppose his criticism, he did manage to influence many of them. One of his best friends, Süskind, decided to turn from theology to church history. Some others decided not to take up posts in the service of the Church in Swabia, and sought posts in other German principalities. Certainly, Diez’s influence could not remain unnoticed. Diez’s friend Süskind was also a relative of Storr. And, in fact, Süskind helped Storr defend his theology and show that this latter was consistent with Kant’s critical philosophy. Eventually, Diez gave up his position as tutor, forwent a career as a minister and studied medicine. A few years later he died of typhus, which he contracted from some patients of his.⁹

This is, briefly, the intellectual climate which influenced Hegel in his youth. Hegel and his fellow students – among whom were Schelling and Hölderlin, both close friends of Hegel – disliked Storr’s theology and

5 Heinrich, “Some Historical Presuppositions of Hegel’s System”, p. 35.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.* p. 36.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

developed their thought in opposition to it. Simultaneously, Hegel and his friends were concerned with what they considered to be the socio-political and cultural crisis of their time. Life was characterized by fragmentation at all levels; the individual was separated from human relationships and the political community as well as from nature; he was divided within himself, as he could not reconcile reason with his emotions; there was also a separation of humans and the divine, as human beings had lost faith in religion.

After completing his studies at the Tübingen Stift, Hegel worked as a private tutor to a well-off family in Bern (1793–1797) and later on as a tutor to a family in Frankfurt (1797–1800). In the course of these seven years he wrote a series of essays, which in the early twentieth century were compiled by Nohl in a single volume;¹⁰ in English these essays are known as *Early Theological Writings*.¹¹ These essays were not intended for publication and some of them are in fragmentary form; Hegel wrote them in order to clarify his own mind. As already mentioned, the young Hegel believed that his time was one of crisis in all spheres of private and social life; and he held the view that the causes of this experience of estrangement lay in religion.¹² So in the so-called *Early Theological Writings* Hegel attempted to account for the social, political and cultural crisis of the German world in terms of religion. In the 1790s there was not a unified German state; rather what came to be known as Germany in the late nineteenth century following unification was at the time a great number of independent German states, diverse in size and with no clear-cut boundaries. This loose confederation of states was the result of the breakup of, what used to be, the Holy Roman Empire. Therefore, whenever we refer to “Germany”, we mean the totality of the German principalities. *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften* include “Volksreligion und Christentum” [“Folk-Religion and Christianity”], “Das Leben Jesu” [“The Life of Jesus”], “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion” [“The Positivity of the Christian Religion”], “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal” [“The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”],

10 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. H. Nohl (Tübingen: Mohr, 1907).

11 G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1948).

12 R. Plant, *Hegel: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

“Systemfragment von 1800” [“The System Fragment of 1800”], as well as some other fragments on love and religion in the appendix.

Reading Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*

The first scholar to study Hegel's early writings was Wilhelm Dilthey,¹³ who examined the thought of the young Hegel in the light of German idealism; Dilthey was interested in the Kant-Fichte-Schelling-Hegel philosophical development.¹⁴ Another interpretation, by far a more common one and no doubt encouraged by the title of Nohl's compendium, has been to see these writings as dealing with a religious experience and religious issues.¹⁵ Unique in the literature stands Laurence Dickey's study of intellectual history, in which he demonstrates that the young Hegel was influenced by the culture of Old Württemberg, by Württemberg's ideal of Protestant civil piety in particular.¹⁶ Finally, Georg Lukács and Raymond Plant focus on the social and political concerns of the young Hegel. Lukács, writing from a Marxist perspective, explores the political and economic ideas of

13 Before Dilthey's study, only those extracts of Hegel's early writings were known that were published by Rosenkranz and Haym; vide K. Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (Berlin: Duncker u. Humblot, 1844) and R. Haym, *Hegel und seine Zeit* (Berlin: Gaertner, 1857).

14 W. Dilthey, “Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels”, in his *Gesammelte Schrifte* Vol. IV (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1921), SS. 1–187.

15 Apart from Nohl, most French scholars adopt this approach. Wahl and Niel see the writings of Hegel's youth as dealing with a religious experience; vide J. Wahl, *Le Malheur de la Conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Les Éditions Rieder, 1929) and H. Niel, *De la Médiation dans la Philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Aubier, 1945). Asvelt regards the young Hegel as a theologian in P. Asvelt, *La Pensée Religieuse de Jeune Hegel: Liberté et Aliénation* (Louvain & Paris: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1953); Asvelt provides a good review of the literature on the young Hegel (pp. 1–9).

16 L. Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit. 1770–1807* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

the young Hegel, as well as the way these have contributed to the development of the dialectical method.¹⁷ Plant has put forward the view that the essays compiled by Nohl in his collection constitute a series of attempts on the part of the young Hegel to comprehend and account for the cultural and socio-political crisis of his time. According to Plant, Hegel sought the causes thereof in religion.¹⁸

Folk Religion and the Fate of Christianity

Already as a student of theology at the Protestant seminary (*Stift*) of the University of Tübingen Hegel had started to ponder on what he considered to be the socio-political and cultural crisis of his time. At this period of his life he seemed to have thought that religion, as understood and practised in the Western world, was at least partly responsible for the social and cultural reality in the Western world in general and in Germany in particular. It is because Hegel valued religion so highly that he set out to examine the causes of the crisis of his contemporary German society in terms of religion.

Religion ist eine der wichtigsten Angelegenheiten unseres Lebens – als Kinder sind wir schon gelehrt worden, Gebete an die Gottheit zu stammeln, schon wurden und die Händchen gefaltet, und sie zu dem erhabensten Wesen zu erheben, unserem Gedächtnis eine Sammlung damals noch unverständlicher Sätze aufgeladen, zum künftigen Gebrauch und Trost in unserem Leben –.¹⁹

[Religion is one of the most important affairs in our life – as children we were already taught to stammer prayers to the Deity, to hold our little hands together in order to raise them to the most sublime Substance, and had our memories burdened

- 17 G. Lukács, *Der junge Hegel und die Probleme der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1954); and *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations Between Dialectics and Economics*, trans. R. Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975).
- 18 Plant, *Hegel: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). Cf. E. Sembou, "The Young Hegel on 'Life' and 'Love'", *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, Double Issue, Nos 53–54 (2006), p. 81.
- 19 *Hegels Theologische Jugenschriften*, S. 3.

with a collection of then still incomprehensible phrases, for our future use and consolation.]²⁰

The religion prevalent in the West at that time was Christianity (either in the form of Catholicism or Protestantism) and this contrasted sharply with an earlier religious experience which Hegel calls *Volksreligion*. The latter refers mostly to the religious life of the Greeks, whose religious, political and cultural patterns of life Hegel admired. There are five fragments extant on this topic and, all together, are entitled by Herman Nohl “*Volksreligion und Christentum*” and published in his edition of Hegel’s *Theologische Jugendschriften*.²¹ These fragments are important because they clarify the major differences between the religion of the Greeks and Christianity. These differences are not only – and significantly – differences of doctrine but differences that have to do with the *essence* of religion and its integration within the wider cultural, social and political world. Hegel believed that if people changed their *conception* of Christianity, perhaps a *Volksreligion* could be created out of it. What made *Volksreligion* and Christianity so radically different was that the former was what Hegel calls a “subjective Religion” [“subjective religion”], whereas the latter a “positive Religion” [“positive religion”]. Importantly, a “subjective religion”, for Hegel, is not a “private” one. As a matter of fact, a “private” religion can involve positive elements as well and Hegel is obviously critical of this. Rather, a “subjective” religion has to be, according to Hegel, a public affair, a religion of a people or a nation. What makes a public religion (*Volksreligion*) “subjective” is that it expresses itself in feelings and actions (“äußert sich nur in Empfindungen und Handlungen”);²² it is alive, effective in the innermost of our essence and active in our outward behaviour (“Subjektive Religion ist lebendig, Wirksamkeit im Innern des Wesens und Tätigkeit nach außen”);²³ it powerfully affects the imagination and the heart (“sie mächtig auf Einbildungskraft und Herz wirkt”) and inspires the whole

20 All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

21 *Ibid.* SS. 3–71.

22 *Ibid.* S. 6.

23 *Ibid.* S. 7.

soul with power and enthusiasm.²⁴ By contrast, “objective religion” is *fides quae creditor*, the understanding (*Verstand*) and the memory (*Gedächtnis*) are the powers that are effective in it and which explore knowledge, think it through and preserve it or believe it too.²⁵ It is interesting that Hegel as early as in Tübingen distinguished between the “understanding” (*Verstand*) and “reason” (*Vernunft*). The *Verstand* he saw as characterizing his contemporary age; it is the way of reasoning of natural science that tends to examine its objects in isolation from one another and that pigeon holes, as it were, different pieces of information into different compartments of knowledge. In general, the *Verstand* is a faculty of the mind that analyses things by distinguishing between “form” and “matter”, “universal” and “particular”, while failing to synthesize these opposites. In so doing, the *Verstand* objectifies the natural world, setting it in opposition to the mind of the researcher. “Objective religion” was, for Hegel, rent with all these contradictions. This is put so nicely as follows:

Subjektive Religion ist etwas individuelles, objective die Abstraktion, jene das lebendige Buch der Natur, die Pflanzen, Insekten, Vögel und Tiere, wie sie untereinander eins vom andern leben, jedes lebt, jedes genießt, sie sind vermischt, überall trifft man alle Arten beisammen an – diese das Kabinet des Naturlehres, der die Insekten getötet, die Pflanzen gedörret, die Tiere ausgetopft oder in Branntwein aufbehält – und alles zusammen ranguert, was die Natur trennte – nur nach Einem Zweck ordnet, wo die Natur unedliche Mannigfaltigkeit von Zwecken in ein freundschaftliches Band verschlang.²⁶

[Subjective religion is something individuated, objective religion is the abstraction, the former [is] the living book of nature, the plants, insects, birds and animals, how they live among and depend on each other, each living, each enjoying, they are mixed together, one can meet all the kinds everywhere – the latter is the cabinet of the natural scientist, who has killed the insects, dried the plants, stuffed or pickled the animals – and put side by side all together the things that nature divided – organized [everything] only for one end, where nature intertwined an infinite diversity in a friendly bond.]

24 *Ibid.* S. 19.

25 *Ibid.* S. 6.

26 *Ibid.* S. 7.

Elsewhere Hegel says that the *Verstand* is the courtier (*Hofmann*) who complies complaisantly with the whims of his master.²⁷ This master is an “objective religion” with its whole mass of religious knowledge (“religiöse Kenntnisse”), this whole system of the connection of our duties and wishes with the Idea of God and of the immortality of the soul that can also be called *Theologie*.²⁸ *Religion*, as opposed to *Theologie*, can gain very little – if at all – by the operations of the *Verstand*, whose doubts and misleading arguments are far more likely to numb the heart than to warm it. After all, it was the *Verstand* that, in its self-conceit, could allow the innocent and last wish of Socrates to offer a cock to the god of health, his noble sense that he should thank the god for his death, which he regarded as a healing, go unappreciated and produce the nasty comment that Tertullian makes in his *Apologeticum*.²⁹ What cold comments were those of some of Jesus’s apostles, when the latter allowed Mary Magdalen, who had hitherto led a life of ill-fame, anoint his legs, thereby showing his love, goodwill, faith and repentance. However, Jesus’s surrounding company were too cold-hearted to empathize with that woman.³⁰

“Enlightenment of the understanding” (“*Aufklärung des Verstands*”) makes us cleverer (“klüger”) but not better. It reduced virtue (“Tugend”) to cleverness, calculated for humans that one could not be happy without virtue, but this calculation is far too sophisticated and too cold (“viel zu spitzfindig und zu kalt”) to be effective in the moment of action or in general to have influence on our lives.³¹ It is precisely this sort of calculations that make the Spirit (*Geist*) so impoverished that, like a wanderer in the desert yearning for a simple drink of water, seems to yearn for its refreshment the mere feeling of the Divine in general.³²

27 *Ibid.* S. 12.

28 *Ibid.* S. 48.

29 *Ibid.* S. 11.

30 *Ibid.* S. 11.

31 *Ibid.* S. 12.

32 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), S. 14.

However, since religion, in the “subjective” sense, is a thing of the heart (“eine Sache des Herzens”), the question might be raised to what extent abstract argument (“Räsonnement”) can be involved in it, if it is to continue being a religion at all. For, when one thinks a great deal about the genesis of one’s emotions, about the practices or customs (“Gebräuche”) that one has to join in, it is almost certain that these feelings of holiness are going to lose their aura of sanctity.³³ Therefore, the task that Hegel set himself in “The Tübingen Essay” of 1793 is to explore what institutions (“Anstalten”) are requisite so that the doctrines and the force of religion can enter into the fabric of human feelings (“daß die Lehren und die Kraft der Religion in das Gewebe der menschlichen Empfindungen eingemischt”).³⁴ In other words, how can a “subjective” religion be created out of an “objective” one? Or, how can a *Volksreligion* be created out of Christianity?

Most importantly, a religion should avoid becoming a *Fetischglaube*, which believes it can gain God’s love for itself through something other than a will that is good in itself,³⁵ so that one is constantly at loggerheads about dogmas (“daß man über dogmatische Lehren ewig in den Haaren liegt”).³⁶ A *Volksreligion*, by contrast, has to be set up in such a way so that, negatively, is able to give as little occasion as possible for cleaving to the letter and the ceremonial observance and, positively, the people may be led to a *Vernunftreligion* and become receptive to it.³⁷ Hegel provides us with three ways whereby an “objective” religion could be transformed into a *Volksreligion*. Firstly, religious doctrines must be based necessarily on “the universal reason” (“*die allgemeine Vernunft*”) of mankind – or, for that matter, a people or a nation – if they are to appeal to the common people.³⁸ These doctrines have to be simple (“einfach”), so that they do not end up being solely a scholarly apparatus; they should be understood by people in the street. Moreover, they have to be “humane” (“menschlich”),

33 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 14.

34 *Ibid.* S. 8.

35 *Ibid.* S. 17.

36 *Ibid.* S. 21.

37 *Ibid.* S. 17.

38 *Ibid.* S. 21.

in the sense that they accord with the “spiritual culture” (“*Geisteskultur*”) and “stage of morality” (“*Stufe von Moralität*”) that a people has reached.³⁹ In “*Die Positivität der christlichen Religion*”,⁴⁰ an essay he wrote a couple of years later when he was a private tutor in Bern, Hegel makes the same point. His concern at the time was that the German world was fragmented not only politically (as there was no national state) but also socially and culturally. There was no common culture, a culture – that is – shared by all the social strata.

The imagery [*Phantasie*] of our more educated classes [*gebildeten Teile*] has an entirely different orbit from that of the common people [*gemeinen Stände*], and the latter do not understand in the least the characters and scenes of those authors and artists who cater for the former.⁴¹

Whereas, Hegel continues:

the Athenian citizen [*der athenische Bürger*] whose property deprived him of the chance to vote in the public assembly, or who even had to sell himself as a slave, still knew as well as Pericles and Alcibiades who Agamemnon and Oedipus were when Sophocles or Euripides brought them on the stage as noble types of beautiful and sublime manhood or when Phidias or Apelles exhibited them as pure models of physical beauty.⁴²

Therefore, what was lacking in the German world was a *Nationalphantasie* that would create a *Volksreligion* similar to that of the ancient Greeks:

Anyone who did not know the history of the city, the culture, and the laws of Athens could almost have learned them from the festivals if he had lived a year within its gates.⁴³

39 *Ibid.* S. 21.

40 *Ibid.* SS. 139–239.

41 *Ibid.* S. 216. The translation is by T. M. Knox in G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 147.

42 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 216; trans. Knox, *Early Theological Writings*, pp. 147–148.

43 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 215; trans. Knox, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 147.

The ancient Germans, too, had once had the home of their Gods (Valhala), as well as their national heroes whose deeds inspired them in battles. But Christianity had emptied Valhalla, the sacred groves and extirpated the national imagery as disgraceful superstition (“die Phantasie des Volks als schändlichen Aberglauben”).⁴⁴ It taught humans to look beyond this world to a transcendent God, who was remote from the community, its morals and customs. Says Hegel:

Außer etwa Luthern bei den Protestanten, welches könnten auch unsere Helden sein, die wir nie eine Nation waren? Welches wäre unser Theseus, der einen Staat gegründet, und ihm Gesetze gegeben hätte?⁴⁵

[Except for instance for Luther with the Protestants, who could be our heroes, we who were never a nation? who would be our Theseus, who has founded a state, and has given it laws?]

Secondly, if religion is to qualify as a *Volksreligion*, it has to appeal to the heart, so that even the purest religion of reason becomes embodied in the soul of the human being (“Auch die reinste Vernunftreligion wird in den Seelen der Menschen”).⁴⁶ With regard to ceremonies, they are surely indispensable in a *Volksreligion*, but it is difficult to prevent them from being regarded as the essence of religion.⁴⁷ These ceremonies ought to spring from the spirit of the people, otherwise they will be lifeless and cold, unable to enhance devotion and heighten pious feelings, incapable of influencing the life of the community at large. And this brings Hegel to what he considers to be the third characteristic of a public (“öffentliche”) or folk religion. As he says:

Wenn die Freuden, die Fröhlichkeit der Menschen sich vor der Religion zu schämen haben – wenn von einem öffentlichen Feste sich der sich luftig machte – in den Tempel schleichen muß – so hat die Form der Religion eine zu düftere Außenseite

44 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 215.

45 *Ibid.* S. 215.

46 *Ibid.* SS. 23–24.

47 *Ibid.* S. 24.

als daß sie sich versprechen dürfte, daß man für ihre Forderungen die Freuden des Lebens hingeben würde –.⁴⁸

[If the joys, the cheerfulness of people have to be ashamed before religion – if he who became merry at a public festival – must sneak into the temple – then the form of religion has a too gloomy outlook to be able to expect of people that they should sacrifice the joys of life to its demands.]

By contrast, religion has to affect “all feelings of life” (“alle Gefühle des Lebens”), stand by people in their business (“bei seinem Geschäften”) as well as in “the most serious affairs of life” (“ernstern Angelegenheiten des Lebens”).⁴⁹ This religion which generates “noble dispositions” (“große Gesinnungen”) goes hand in hand with “freedom” (“Freiheit”). What freedom could the Germans of Hegel’s day have when they had to direct their gaze towards Heaven so that human feelings became “alien” (“*fremd*”) to them; when one is afraid of contracting from the common cup the venereal disease of the person who drank before him/her at a public festival, which should be one closer to another?⁵⁰ Therefore, as early as in 1793 Hegel touches on a theme which would preoccupy him for the rest of his life and which is also central in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), namely, “estrangement” or “alienation” (“*Entfremdung*”), separation of humans from their natural environment and society.

In the essay “Das Leben Jesu” [“The Life of Jesus”] Hegel recounts the life of Jesus from his birth till his death. He was born in the Judaeian village of Bethlehem to Joseph and Mary. He was an intelligent boy, but nothing else has passed down to us until the age of thirty, when he appeared as a teacher of moral virtue. He came to know John “the Baptist”, who also baptized him. After his thirtieth year, whereupon he made his public appearance as a teacher, he confined his discourses only to a few people. Soon a number of friends joined him and accompanied him everywhere. Says Hegel:

48 *Ibid.* S. 26.

49 *Ibid.* S. 26.

50 *Ibid.* S. 27.

... aus denen er durch sein Beispiel und seine Belerhungen den eingeschränkten Geist jüdischer Vorurteile und jüdischen Nationalstolzes zu vertreiben, und sie mit seinem Geiste "zu erfüllen suchte", der nur in Tugend, die nicht an eine besondere Nation oder positive Einrichtungen gebunden ist – einen Wert setzte.⁵¹

[... from them he sought through example and his teachings to remove the limited spirit of jewish prejudices and jewish national pride, and he sought to fill them with his spirit, which put a worth only in virtue, which was not bound to a specific nation or positive institutions.]

He taught his followers not to be satisfied "by the letter of the law" ("des Buchstabens der Gesetzte") like the Pharisees; rather they should act "in the spirit of the law" ("im Geiste des Gesetztes") out of respect for duty.⁵² He also taught: "Heiligkeit ist euer Ziel, wie die Gottheit heilig ist" ["holiness is your goal, like the Deity is holy"].⁵³ Moreover, he taught about the Kingdom of God ("das Reich Gottes"). This does not manifest itself outwardly in the real world; it is rather within oneself.⁵⁴ Jesus encountered the Pharisees on several occasions. On one such occasion the Pharisees tried to trap him into overt opposition to the Roman authorities. They thus addressed to him the question whether he thought it was right that they paid taxes to the Roman emperor. Jesus was annoyed and, noticing their intentions, called them "hypocrites" ("Ihr Heuchler"); if they granted the Caesar the right to coin money, then they should pay what is due to Caesar, and give what is due to God.⁵⁵ A Pharisee asked Jesus about the highest principle of the moral law. Jesus replied:

Es ist ein Gott, und diesen sollst du von ganzem Herzen lieben, und ihm deinen Willen, deine ganze Seele, alle deine Kräfte weihn, dies ist das erste Gebot; das zweite ist diesem an Verbindlichkeit ganz gleich, und leitet so: liebe jeden Menschen als wenn er Du selbst wäre; ein höheres Gebot gibt es nicht –.⁵⁶

51 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 78.

52 *Ibid.* S. 83.

53 *Ibid.* S. 84.

54 *Ibid.* S. 112.

55 *Ibid.* SS. 119–120.

56 *Ibid.* S. 120.

[There is one God, and you must love him with your whole heart, and devote to him your will, your whole soul, all your powers; this is the first commandment. The second is as binding as this one, and directs this: love each human as if he were you yourself; there is no higher commandment –]

“Das Leben Jesu” is an essay which focuses on Jesus’s teaching. It presents him as a moral teacher in particular. We are told of his entry in Jerusalem and his sojourn in Jericho. In the end Hegel tells us of his last Passover, his betrayal by Judas, his capture and encounter with the high priest, Caiaphas, his interrogation, his condemnation to death by the High Council of Jerusalem, his encounter with Pilate (who was initially unwilling to condemn him to death), his crucifixion and death on the cross.

In Bern Hegel looked at the causes underlying the “positivity” of the Christian religion. In an essay that bears the title “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion” he set out to explore the development of the Christian religion from the time of Jesus Christ to the form it had taken in the late eighteenth century. The questions that Hegel poses are how it was possible for Christianity to come to be a positive religion, given Christ’s opposition to the authoritarian positivity of Judaism and how it came to supplant the folk religions of antiquity, given that folk religions were deep rooted in the lives and consciousness of the people.

For Hegel, Jesus was an important historical figure. He had been free from the contagious sickness of his age and his people. Therefore:

unternahm [er] es, Religion und Tugend zur Moralität zu erheben, und die Freiheit derselben, worin ihr Wesen besteht, wiederherzustellen ...⁵⁷

[he undertook this [task], to raise religion and virtue to morality, and to restore to the same [i.e. morality] the freedom which is its essence ...]

However, there were certain elements in Jesus’s life and teaching that were to transform the purely moral religion he initiated into a “positive” religion following his death. To begin with, if Jesus had to make an impression on the narrow and legalist consciousness of the Jews, he had to accommodate

his teaching to the Jewish reality. For example, miracles and so forth were not intended to be the basis of doctrines but were only intended to arouse the attention of people who had no ears for morality. Similarly, many ideas of the time, such as the expectation of a Messiah or the ascription of incurable diseases to an evil being, were simply *used* by Jesus in order to make his message more palpable and intelligible. However, these contemporary ideas were not meant to be the essence of Jesus's religion, for that essence could not but be eternal and unchangeable.⁵⁸ Moreover, a teacher like Jesus, whose purpose was not to comment further on the nature and interpretation of the commands of the Jewish faith, necessarily had to base his own moral message on a like authority. This was unfortunate, as it led to the creation of faith first in his person and only subsequently in his teachings.⁵⁹ Since the Jews were expecting a Messiah at the time, they were disposed to accept a teaching different from that which they already had in their sacred documents and they were disposed to accept that teaching only from him. So Jesus presented himself as this Messiah and tried to lead the Jews' messianic hopes towards morality.⁶⁰ Another positive element, for Hegel, derived from the disciples of Jesus.

so scheint doch soviel gewiß zu sein, daß sie sich durch Rechtschaffenheit, Mut und Standhaftigkeit im Bekennender Lehre ihres Masters, Demut und Freundlichkeit auszeichneten, dabei aber an einen eingeschränkten Kreis der Tätigkeit gewöhnt, ihre Handwerke, so wie man diese gewöhnlich lernt und treibt, handwerkmäßig gelernt und getrieben hatten ... und ohne einen großen Schatz eigener Energie des Geistes zu besitzen, hatte ihre Ueberzeugung von der Lehre Jesu vorzüglich auch in ihrer Freundschaft und Anhänglichkeit an ihn ihren Grund; sie hatten Wahrheit und Freiheit nicht selbst errungen ...⁶¹

[this much seems certain, that they distinguished themselves for their humility, friendliness, honesty, courage, and firmness in professing their master's teachings, but they were accustomed to a restricted sphere of activity, had learned and practised their crafts, as one usually learns and practises them ... and without possessing a great treasure [i.e. a great amount] of spiritual energy of their own, their conviction about

58 *Ibid.* S. 155.

59 *Ibid.* SS. 158–159.

60 *Ibid.* SS. 159–160.

61 *Ibid.* S. 162.

the teachings of Jesus was primarily based upon their friendship with and dependence on him; they had not reached themselves truth and freedom ...]

In this way, the disciples of Jesus contrasted sharply with the disciples of Socrates's, another moral figure whom Hegel admired. Socrates's pupils were versatile, as they had developed their powers in many directions; they had not restricted themselves to a single activity. They were as good students as they were good citizens. They were as interested in political affairs as they were good soldiers. Most importantly, they loved Socrates because of his philosophy and virtue, rather than liking his philosophy and virtue because of Socrates's personality. Most of them had also associated themselves with other philosophers, had come into contact with a great variety of intellectual currents, were able to stamp what they had learned with their own originality, while many of those were able to found schools of their own.⁶² Another positive element that was inherent in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples is that the number of the disciples had been fixed to twelve, resulting in the ascription of more value to these chosen few. This was the seed of an élitism that has characterized the Christian Church from Medieval times onwards. As the influence of Christianity expanded across Europe, this eclecticism had as a necessary consequence the establishment of Church Councils that made pronouncements about true doctrine (orthodoxy) and imposed their decrees on the people as a norm of faith.⁶³ This eclecticism was also responsible for this zeal of expansion and proselytization – even fanaticism – that had characterized Christianity in the High Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the adherent of every sect who regards morality as the core of his/her faith and who had a pure heart will embrace an adherent of any other sect as a brother. A Christian of the latter kind will say to a Jew who also values morality so highly:

Ihr seid ein Christ – Bei Gott, Ihr seid ein Christ!
Ein besserer Christ war nie!

[You are a Christian – My God, you are a Christian!
Never was there a better Christian!]

62 *Ibid.* S. 163.

63 *Ibid.* S. 164.

And to this Christian the Jew will reply:

Wohl uns! Denn was
 Mich Euch zum Christen macht, das macht Euch mir
 Zum Juden!⁶⁴

[Well-being to us! For what
 makes me a Christian to you, that makes you a Jew to me!]

Furthermore, the method whereby Jesus chose to spread his moral religion led to the positivity of Christianity; for, not being able to visit all the places himself, he sent his disciples forth into different districts. But the disciples were not particularly talented themselves, while their almost total dependence on Jesus disqualified them from being moral teachers of their own.⁶⁵ Related to the foregoing is the command that Jesus gave to his disciples after his Resurrection to spread his teachings as well as his name, as worded in Mark xvi. 15–18. According to Hegel, this command differed glaringly from Jesus's parting words before his death that characterized the teacher of virtue (*Tugendlehrer*).

Statt: gehen hin usw. hätte ein Tugendlehrer vielleicht gesagt: ein jeder in dem Kreise der Tätigkeit, den ihm Natur und Vorsehung angewiesen, wirke soviel Gutes als möglich.⁶⁶

[Instead of "Go ye", etc., a teacher of virtue would perhaps have said: "Let every man do as much good as possible in the sphere of activity assigned to him by nature and Providence."⁶⁷]

In his farewell after the Last Supper Jesus placed all value in *doing* ("auf das Tun"), whereas in the passage cited by Mark all value is placed in *believing* ("auf Glauben"). In addition, Jesus set "an external sign" ("ein äußeres Zeichen"), viz. baptism, as a distinguishing mark, thus making these two

64 *Ibid.* S. 170. Hegel is actually quoting from Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, IV, 7 here.

65 *Ibid.* S. 164.

66 *Ibid.*

67 Trans. Knox, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 84.

things the positive criteria for belief, the condition so much of salvation as of damnation.⁶⁸ Therefore, what used to be a moral religion, a religion that taught virtues and whose purpose was to appeal to the human heart, was transformed into a positive religion; and what is otherwise a contradictory conception, the religion of Jesus became a positive doctrine of virtue (“und was sonst ein widersprechender Begriff ist, die Religion Jesu wurde zu einer positiven Tugendlehre”).⁶⁹

How was it possible for Christianity to conquer paganism?

Eine Revolution von der Art, wie die, daß eine einheimische, uralte Religion von einer fremden verdrängt wird, eine solche Revolution, die sich unmittelbar im Geisterreiche zuträgt, muß um so unmittelbarer in dem Geiste der Zeit selbst ihre Ursachen finden –⁷⁰

[a revolution of the kind, as this, that a native, immemorial religion comes to be displaced by a foreign one, such a revolution, which takes place directly in the spiritual realm, must have its causes all the more directly in the spirit of the times]

Despite the self-conceit of Christianity, which claims that its victory over paganism was owing to its superior, better adapted to the age doctrines, paganism's loss of sway over the minds and lives of the people was due to internal causes. These causes were mostly of a political and cultural nature. Greek and Roman religion was a religion for free peoples only, so that, with the loss of freedom of the peoples living around the Mediterranean Sea following Roman expansion, the nature of religion changed. This was inevitable since *Volksreligion* had always been intertwined with the social and political life of the Greek city-states and the Roman Republic. As a result of fortunate campaigns and consequent increase of wealth, an aristocracy established itself in both Athens and Rome. This new aristocracy enjoyed wealth and military glory. The great bulk of the people, therefore, lost a lot of the freedoms they enjoyed under a democratic or republican régime, respectively. The aristocracy had managed to monopolize political

68 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 164.

69 *Ibid.* S. 166.

70 *Ibid.* S. 220.

power, excluding the masses from public affairs; the masses could not do but accept *de jure* the status quo that had established itself *de facto*.⁷¹ Not only did individuals lose their political freedom, but also:

Das Bild des Staates, als ein Produkt seiner Tätigkeit verschwand aus der Seele des Bürgers; die Sorge, die Uebersicht des Ganzen ruhte in der Seele eines Einzigen, oder einiger Wenigen; ein jeder hatte seinen ihm angewiesenen mehr oder weniger eingeschränkten, von dem Platze des andern verschiedenen Platz; einer geringen Anzahl von Bürgern war die Regierung der Staatsmaschine anvertraut, und diese dienten nur als einzlne Räder ... der jedem anvertraute Teil des zerstückelten Ganzen war im Verhältnis zu diesem so unbeträchtlich, daß der Einzelne dieses Verhältnis nicht zu kennen oder vor Augen zu haben brauchte –⁷²

[The picture of the state as a product of his own energies disappeared from the citizen's soul. The care and oversight of the whole rested on the soul of one man or a few. Each individual had his own allotted place, a place more or less restricted and different from their neighbor's. The administration of the state machine was entrusted to a small number of citizens, and these served as single cogs ... Each man's allotted part in the congeries which formed the whole was so inconsiderable in relation to the whole that the individual did not need to realize this relation or to keep it in view.⁷³]

Thus there emerged a division of labour. In consequence, humans gradually ceased to be the all-rounded persons the Greeks used to be. They restricted themselves to a specific activity allotted to them in the Roman Empire and directed all their powers towards it. As a result of this development, the homogeneity of the Greek city-states gave its way to the heterogeneity of the Roman Empire. In the circumstances people adopted a religion that was most suitable to their situation.⁷⁴ Christianity taught humans to seek consolation and happiness in heaven. This was the corollary of the despotism of the Roman Emperors; this despotism had extirpated all hopes of the common people to find bliss and peace on earth. Says Hegel:

⁷¹ *Ibid.* SS. 222–223.

⁷² *Ibid.* S. 223.

⁷³ Trans. T. M. Knox, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 156.

⁷⁴ *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 224.

Die Objektivität der Gottheit ist mit der Verdorbenheit und Sklaverei der Menschen in gleichem Schritte gegangen, und jene ist eigentlich nur eine Offenbarung, nur eine Erscheinung dieses Geistes der Zeiten.⁷⁵

[The objectivity of the Deity has gone together with the corruption and slavery of humans, and it is actually only a revelation, only an outward appearance of this spirit of the times.]

The foregoing allows us to make the following observation. In his essay on “Volksreligion und Christentum” Hegel had concentrated on religion *per se*, as he believed that religion was responsible for the crisis besetting his contemporary society. However, by the time he was writing the essay on “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion” in Bern, it must have occurred to him that religious experience could not be the sole factor affecting people’s lives; other factors – particularly, of an economic and political nature – should also be taken into consideration when examining the condition of a society. In fact, as we have seen, in the aforesaid essay Hegel maintained that one of the underlying causes of the “positivity” of Christianity was the fact that the expansion of the Roman Republic into an Empire, and the emergence of a new aristocracy as well as a division of labour had prepared the ground for an authoritarian religion. Therefore, it became apparent that there was a correspondence between religion and the socio-political realm. At this stage, of course, Hegel did not develop this idea further. It was a seed of his later thought.

In Frankfurt (1797–1800) Hegel wrote “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”.⁷⁶ The “positivity” of Christianity is the main theme here too. However, the essay refers as much to Judaism as to Christianity; in particular, it explores the Jewish background of Christianity. What is interesting is that Hegel draws a comparison between a “positive” religion, such as Judaism, and Kantian morality. In comparing Kant’s morality to Judaism, Hegel’s purpose was polemical. The analogy was as follows: Judaism is a religion of slavery just as Kantianism is a morality of serfdom.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* SS. 227–228.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* SS. 241–342.

For Hegel, all the contradictions that Judaism displayed were to a large extent due to the personality of its founder, Abraham. The latter had led a life that was full of divisiveness and alienation.

Der erste Akt, durch den Abraham zum Stammvater einer Religion wird, ist eine *Trennung*, welche die Bande des Zusammenlebens und der Liebe zerreißt, das Ganze der Beziehungen, in denen er mit Menschen und Natur bisher gelebt hatte; diese schöne Beziehungen seiner Tugend (Jos. 24, 2) stieß er von sich.⁷⁷

[The first act, whereby Abraham became the progenitor of a nation, is a *separation*, which tears to pieces the bonds of communal life and love, the entirety of the relationships, in which he had hitherto lived with people and nature; these beautiful relationships of his youth (Joshua 24, 2) he rejected.]

Abraham's separation from both other people and nature contrasts sharply with Hegel's conception of love. For "Abraham wollte *nicht* lieben und darum frei sein"⁷⁸ ["Abraham did *not* want to love and therefore to be free."] The fate of Judaism followed directly from this. However, the contradictions of Abraham's life went on. For the same spirit that had made Abraham desert his kin and nation led him through his encounters with foreign peoples for the rest of his life. He tried hard – tremendously hard – not to enter into any sort of ties with the populations he met on his way.⁷⁹ He also posed a transcendent God over above him and the world and it was only through God that Abraham came into a mediate relation with the world.⁸⁰ The relationship between Abraham and God determined the fate of the Hebrew nation and was one predicated upon a master–slave relation. How far this ideal was from the Greek conception of religion is obvious. In ancient Greece the Gods had been involved in human affairs; they had not been "alien" ("*fremd*") to reality. Religion had been the bond binding the *polis* together. And the Gods had represented different forces of nature. Greek temples had been places of worship, whereby devotion to

77 *Ibid.* SS. 245–246 (my italics for emphasis).

78 *Ibid.* S. 246.

79 *Ibid.*

80 *Ibid.* S. 247.

the God concerned was enhanced and pious feelings would be heightened. Since religion was so much integrated in the life of the city-state, temples too played a significant part in all human activities. Thus, Greek temples preserved the “spirit of the people” (“*Volksgeist*”) within their walls. However, when Pompey reached the centre of the Temple, where the Jews had confined their God, hoping that he would find in it “the root of the national spirit” (“*die Wurzel des National-Geistes*”), he might well have been surprised to find nothing but an empty room.⁸¹ It is against this background that Hegel set out to examine the life and message of Jesus.

Jesus made his appearance shortly before the final crisis caused by the fermentation of the elements and oppositions that characterized Jewish life. The task that he set to himself was to fight against, not only a part of the Jewish fate, but against the whole.⁸² Therefore, he had to fight against this element of Judaism that exercised greater influence on the affairs of his people. This was religion, particularly the Judaic conception of a transcendent God set over against this world. Jesus wished to substitute this conception of a master–slave relationship – which the Jews had with their God – with one that would equalize these opposites and would emphasize love. Accordingly:

Geboten, die einen bloßen Dienst des Herrn, eine unmittelbare Knechtschaft, einen Gehorsam ohne Freude, ohne Luft und Liebe verlangten ... stellte Jesus das ihnen gerade Entgegengesetzte, einen *Trieb*, sogar ein *Bedürfnis des Menschen* gegenüber.⁸³

[Jesus set over against commandments, which called for a bare service of the Master, an immediate slavery, obedience without joy, without pleasure and love ... an *urge*, even a *human need*.]

Regarding religious practices (“*Religiöse Handlungen*”), they are meant to be an endeavour to overcome or unify the oppositions in ourselves, as well as an attempt to bring that ideal of unification down to reality. Consequently, if the “spirit of beauty” (“*Geist der Schönheit*”) is lacking in

81 *Ibid.* SS. 250–251.

82 *Ibid.* S. 261.

83 *Ibid.* S. 262 (my italics for emphasis).

religious ceremonies, these are the most empty of all (“die leersten”); they become “the most senseless bondage” (“die sinnloseste Knechtschaft”), wherein a person’s “nullity” (“Nichtssein”) and “passivity” (“Passivität”) comes to the fore.⁸⁴ Hegel emphasizes the fact that “against purely objective commandments” (“gegen die rein objektiven Gebote”) Jesus set “something totally alien” (“etwas ganz fremdes”) to the Jews, that is, “the subjective in general” (“das Subjektive im allgemeinen”).⁸⁵ This subjectivity related, of course, to a totally different sphere that the Jews had never considered up to that time and that was contrary to the punctiliousness to which they were accustomed. Against “the purity or impurity of an object” (“die Reinheit oder Unreinheit eines Objektes”), Jesus set “the purity or impurity of the heart” (“die Reinheit oder Unreinheit des Herzens”).⁸⁶

This Jesus did, in particular, in his Sermon on the Mount, whose purpose was to remove “the legal” (“das Gesetzliche”) from the laws, in accordance with which the Jews had organized their social and political life. The Sermon constituted an attempt on the part of Jesus to preach fulfilment of the law in such a way as the legal form of the law is annulled, thereby making the law itself superfluous.⁸⁷ This does not mean to imply that laws should disappear, “rather they should be fulfilled through a righteousness” (“sondern sie müssen durch eine Gerechtigkeit erfüllt werden”), which is something more than the righteousness of duty.⁸⁸ It is actually “a completion” (“eine Ausfüllung”) which makes up for the deficiency (i.e. legality) in the laws and refers to “an inclination” (“eine Geneigtheit”) so to act as the laws may command; in this way, there follows “a unity of opinion [one’s mind] with the law, whereby the latter loses its form as law” (“Einigkeit der Meinung mit dem Gesetze, wodurch dieses seine Form als Gesetz verliert”).⁸⁹ This inclination or predisposition to act as the laws may command is “a virtue” (“eine Tugend”), “a synthesis” (“eine Synthese”), in

84 *Ibid.* S. 262.

85 *Ibid.* S. 264.

86 *Ibid.* S. 264.

87 *Ibid.* S. 266.

88 *Ibid.* S. 267.

89 *Ibid.* S. 268.

which the law (the object) loses its “universality” (“Allgemeinheit”) and the subject its “particularity” (“Besonderheit”). As a result, not only is there a unity of object and subject but also of the universal and the particular.

so ist jene Uebereinstimmung *Leben*, und als Beziehung Verschiedener, *Liebe*.⁹⁰

[so is that agreement *life*, and as the relation of different, *love*.]

How does Kantian morality relate to the “positivity” of Judaism? What was wrong with the moralism of Kant? After all, Kant had argued that every individual is free when he/she obeys not some higher authority but his/her own reason. But, Hegel argues, the difference is not that a Jew makes (him-) herself a slave to a transcendent God, while a Kantian is free; “sondern daß jener den Herren außer sich, dieser aber den Herren in sich trägt, zugleich aber sein eigener Knecht ist” [“but that the former carries his/her master outside him/her, whereas the latter carries his/her master within him/her, at the same time being his/her own slave”].⁹¹ Kant valued “duty” (“Pflicht”) so highly that he asserted that one’s morality should be based on one’s duty, as prescribed by one’s reason. The implication of this, however, was that reason was severed all too sharply from one’s impulses and emotional realm. For reason was supposed to be suppressing one’s inclinations as well as other natural impulses. According to Hegel, the person whose desires and natural impulses are in bondage to reason cannot possibly be free; rather, he/she is a slave too, albeit a slave of (him-) herself. This is because, from the point of view of feelings and desires, the individual must submit to an external authority, namely, the authority of reason. This leaves the individual concerned a duality, unable ever to resolve his/her inner contradictions, his/her person vacillating between the “noumenal” and “phenomenal” realms.

So far Hegel has considered the possibilities whereby a unification of law and inclination can be brought about. Love can oppose the *form* of

90 *Ibid.* S. 268 (my italics for emphasis). Hegel also uses the term “Versöhnlichkeit” [“reconcilability”] for this correspondence of law and inclination. Vide *ibid.* S. 269.

91 *Ibid.* S. 266.

law in such a way that the latter loses its form. He saw Jesus's Sermon on the Mount geared towards this end. However, how can a reconciliation take place when law is opposed to *content*? How can a given law continue to be after it has been trespassed? This can be achieved only by means of punishment. Nevertheless, Hegel is careful to distinguish between two kinds of punishment; he finds the one kind thereof problematical and beset with contradictions, and he applauds the other.

Die Strafe ist Wirkung eines übertretenen Gesetzes, von dem der Mensch sich losgesagt hat, aber von welchem er noch abhängt, und welchem, weder der Strafe noch seiner Tat, er nicht entliehen kann. Denn da "der" Charakter des Gesetzes Allgemeinheit ist, so hat der Verbrecher zwar die *Materie* des Gesetzes zerbrochen, aber die *Form*, die Allgemeinheit bleibt, und das Gesetz, über das er Meister geworden zu sein "glaubte", bleibt, erscheint aber seinem Inhalt nach entgegengesetzt, es hat die Gehalt der Allgemeinheit und ist Gesetz; diese Verkehrtheit desselben, daß es das Gegenteil dessen wird, was er vorher war, ist die Strafe – indem sich der Mensch vom Gesetz losgemacht hat, bleibt er ihm noch untertan; und da das Gesetz als Allgemeines bleibt, so bleibt auch die Tat, denn sie ist das Besondere.⁹²

[Punishment is the effect of a violated law, whence the individual has broken, but on which he still depends, and which [the law], neither the punishment nor the act, he cannot flee. Since the character of the law is universality, the criminal has in fact smashed the *matter* of the law, but the *form*, the universality remains, and the law, over which he believed he had become a master, remains, but in its content it appears opposed, it has the shape of universality and is law; this perversion⁹³ of the law, that it becomes the opposite of what it was before, is punishment – while the individual has freed himself from the law, he still remains in subjection to it; and since the law remains as a universal, so too does the act, for it is the particular.]

This was the conception of punishment held both by Judaism and Kantianism. What Hegel means to say in the foregoing passage is that when the law is considered to be a universal against which all particulars acts of the individuals are posed, the law-actions relationship conceals a contradiction in its very conception; for universal and particular are

92 *Ibid.* SS. 279–280 (my italics for emphasis).

93 I have used T. M. Knox's translation of the term "Verkehrtheit" here. See *Early Theological Writings*, p. 228.

opposed right from the beginning. There is not an initial state of harmony, as it were. Now, should a violation of the law take place, the action contravening the law opposes its own content to that of the law. Punishment is designed to overcome this opposition. However, the opposition was inherent even before crime took place. Punishment is going to bring the initial state again, but without having solved the contradiction that existed between the master (the law) and the slave (the individual) in the first place. The law will remain external to the person who has committed the crime, even after the crime has been redressed. In fact, the contradiction may become even greater than before, since the person concerned will be carrying the crime in his/her consciousness. In other words, with respect to the individual the crime has not been redressed; it has been redressed only from the narrow legalist point of view: "Von Versöhnung ... kann also bei der Gerechtigkeit nicht die Rede sein" ["of reconciliation ... there can therefore be no question in the realm of justice"].⁹⁴

Hegel opposes another conception of punishment to the one mentioned above. This is as follows:

Die Strafe als Schicksal vorgestellt ist ganz anderer Art ... In dieser frindlichen Macht ist auch das Allgemeine vom Besondern nicht in der Rücksicht getrennt, wie das Gesetz als Allgemeines dem Menschen oder seinen Meinungen als dem Besonderen entgegengesetzt ist. Das Schicksal ist nur der Feind, und der Mensch steht ihm ebenso gut als kämpfende Macht gegenüber.⁹⁵

[Punishment as fate is of a totally different kind ... In this hostile power [of fate] the universal is not separated from the particular in the way, in which law as universal is opposed to the individual or his/her inclinations as the particular. Fate is just the enemy, and the individual stands over against it just as well as a power fighting against it.]

What exactly is punishment as fate? In fate universal and particular are united from the beginning, since there is not a distinction between the law (master) and the individual (slave). The individual does not exist in

94 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 288.

95 *Ibid.* S. 280.

isolation from his/her natural surroundings, society and the political world. This is the reason why “fate” was so well suited to the homogeneous city-states of ancient Greece and Hegel is clearly referring to this Greek ideal here. Life – as the harmony of the universal and particular – now confronts the person concerned as an enemy; this is the fate of the transgressor. But this fate is turned aside if he/she surrenders to life and clings to love. “The same blows that the criminal has dealt, he experiences again” (“Die gleichen Schläge, die der Verbrecher ausgeübt hat, erfährt er wieder”); tyrants are confronted by torturers, murderers by executioners.⁹⁶ However, since the hostility of fate is not grounded in an alien law (i.e. external to the individual concerned), it is possible for the criminal and life to find the equilibrium that they have lost, that is, to return to wholeness, to the original harmony. This can happen

Denn der Sünder ist mehr als seine existierende Sünde, ein Persönlichkeit habendes Verbrechen; er ist Mensch, Verbrechen und Schicksal ist in ihm, er kann wieder zu sich selbst zurückkehren, und wenn er zurückkehrt, unter ihm.⁹⁷

[for the sinner is more than an existent sin, a crime that has personality; he is a man, crime and fate are in him, he can return to himself again, and when he does return [to himself], [crime and fate are] under him.]

The criminal will return to himself once his “bad conscience” (“böses Gewissen”) has disappeared: “das Leben hat in der Liebe das Leben wiedergefunden” [“life has in love found life again”].⁹⁸

Hegel had Sophocles’s play *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Οἰδίππους Τύραννος) in mind when he was writing this passage on “punishment as fate”. On Hegel’s reading of Sophocles’s tragedy, Oedipus represented a figure who was caught in the toils of fate; his life was a fight against his fate with which he was trying to reconcile himself. Despite the connotations that the word “tyrant” later acquired, Oedipus was a righteous king. He had assumed power after he had solved the enigma of the Sphinx, who had

96 *Ibid.* S. 288.

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Ibid.* S. 289.

been tyrannizing the inhabitants of Thebes for a long time. However, he had to confront his “fate”. He had unknowingly broken the divine law by killing his father (Laius) and getting married to his mother (Jocasta). He had thereby injured “life”. “Life” sent a blow back and confronted him as an enemy. Oedipus had to find out about his sin and “fate” pushed him toward the discovery of the truth.

Ἰοῦ ἰοῦ τὰ πάντ’ ἄν ἐξήκοι σαφῆ.
 ὦ φῶς, τελευταῖόν σε προσβλέψαιμι νῦν,
 ὅστις πέφασμαι φύς τ’ ἄφ’ ὧν οὐ χρῆν, ξὺν οἷς τ’
 οὐ χρῆν ὁμιλῶν, οὗς τέ μ’ οὐκ ἔδει κτανῶν.⁹⁹

[Alas alas; everything becomes clear.
 Oh light, I’ll see you for the last time now,
 I who has been born by those by whom I ought not [to be born], and with whom
 I have slept when I ought not, and of whom I am the murderer.]

In order to reconcile himself with his fate, Oedipus subjected himself to what he considered to be a just punishment, that is, he blinded himself. This hostility of fate against which Oedipus fought had been caused by his own free actions, in the first place. Crime and fate were in him. He returned to himself again through punishing himself, thereby subjecting both fate and crime under him. Following his punishment, the crime still exists, but only as something past, merely as a fragment of his life. That part of it that was a bad conscience has disappeared and life has found life once more: “das Leben entzweite sich mit sich selbst und vereinigte sich wieder” [“life divided/separated itself with itself and united itself again”].¹⁰⁰

It is Hegel’s view, as put forth in “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, that Jesus too found within “life” the connection between sins and the forgiveness of sins. Where he found faith, he would say “Deine Sünden sind dir vergeben” [“You are forgiven for your sins”]. This statement ran totally counter to the spirit of the Jews, for whom there existed an irreparable gap between impulse and action, desire and deed, life and

99 Sophocles, “Oedipus Tyrannus”, 1182–1185.

100 Hegels *Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 289.

offence and forgiveness.¹⁰¹ It was for this reason that the message of Jesus was doomed to failure; the Jewish spirit (“jüdische Geist”) pervaded all aspects of human life and it had managed to make itself into a state. And, since the Jewish state was there and Jesus could escape its laws, he was forced to subject himself to an “alien power” (“fremde Macht”).

Wegen der Verunreinigung des Lebens konnte Jesus das Reich Gottes nur im Herz tragen, mit Menschen nur in Beziehung treten, um sie zu bilden, um den guten Geist, an den er in ihnen glaubte, zu entwickeln; um erst Menschen zu schaffen, deren Welt die seinige wäre; aber in seiner wirklichen Welt mußte er alle lebendigen Beziehungen fliehen, weil alle unter dem Gesetze des Todes lagen, die Menschen unter der Gewalt des Jüdischen gefangen waren, durch ein von beiden Seiten freies Verhältnis wäre er in einem Bund mit dem Gewebe jüdischer Gesetzmäßigkeiten eingetreten ...¹⁰²

[Due to the impurity of life, Jesus could carry the kingdom of God only in the heart, enter in relationship with people, in order to educate them, in order to develop the good spirit, in which he believed in them; in order first to create men, whose world would be his; but in his real world he had to flee all living relationships, because they all lay under the law of death, the men were under the force of the Jewish [spirit] imprisoned, through one of both sides of free relation he would have entered in a bond with the fabric of jewish legalities.]

This brings us back to the theme of “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion”. Jesus could not escape the fate of his nation, after all. He either had to separate himself totally from the life of his people and, in so doing, desert all hopes for reform, or he had to compromise, to make the fate of the Jews his own but by sacrificing his own “beauty” (“Schönheit”) and purity of heart. In neither case could his own nature be fulfilled.¹⁰³ But, in the end, he had to choose the latter. Consequently, it was the fate of Christianity to become a “positive” religion:

und es ist ihr Schicksal, daß Kirche und Staat, Gottesdienst und Leben, Frömmigkeit und Tugend, geistliches und weltliches Tun nie ein Eins zusammenschmelzen können.¹⁰⁴

101 *Ibid.* S. 290.

102 *Ibid.* S. 328.

103 *Ibid.* S. 328.

104 *Ibid.* S. 342.

[and it is its fate, that Church and State, divine service and life, piety and virtue, spiritual and worldly activity cannot dissolve into one.]

The above statement is a confirmation of Hegel's early views on the Christian religion and the fact that the latter is largely responsible for the socio-political and cultural disorder in his contemporary German world. In the early fragments on "Volkreligion und Christentum" Hegel had been concerned with a diagnosis of the fragmentation besetting German society in terms of religion. Once he had identified the differences between Christianity and the religious experience of more homogeneous societies (folk-religion), he moved on to explore the causes underlying – what he considered to be – the "defective" nature of Christianity. This he did in his essays on "Die Positivität der christlichen Religion" and "Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal". Therefore, the writings that have been compiled together by Herman Nohl as *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften* examine a common theme – namely, the nature of Christianity and its weaknesses – albeit each from a slightly different angle.

The "Systemfragment von 1800", also published in Nohl's collection of *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, consisted of forty-seven sheets; unfortunately, only the thirty-fourth and forty-seventh survive. This fragment is important in at least two respects. First of all, it is a recapitulation of Hegel's thought up to that time. Secondly, and more significantly, it marks a turning-point in Hegel's development, as it foreshadows Hegel's association with Schelling.¹⁰⁵ His main position in the fragment is that the social and cultural crisis of his contemporary Germany is due to the failure to reconcile such opposites as the "finite" and the "infinite", "humans" and "God", the "subjective" and "objective" realms, an "individual" and other "individuals" (or, for that matter, an "individual" and "society"). With regard to the latter, Hegel says that, according to a viewpoint:

ein Mensch ist ein individuelles Leben, insofern er ein anderes ist, als alle Elemente, und als die Unendlichkeit der individuellen Leben außer ihm, er ist nur ein

105 Hegel uses the term "Natur", *ibid.* SS. 346–347. His statement "die Natur nicht selbst Leben, sondern ein von der Reflexion ob zwar aufs würdigste behandeltes fixiertes Leben ist", *ibid.* S. 347, may well be considered to be a reference to Schelling's philosophy of nature.

individuelles Leben, indsofern er eins ist mit allen Elementen, aller Unendlichkeit der Leben außer ihm¹⁰⁶

[a human being is an individual life, in so far as he is an other from all the elements and from the infinity of individual lives outside him, he is only an individual life, in so far as he is one with all the elements, with the infinity of lives outside him]

A human being exists in isolation only inasmuch as life (*das Leben*) in its totality has divided itself into parts, namely, when communal bonds have broken down, so that individuals – each a life of his/her own – pursue their private interests, which – more often than not – ran counter to the public weal. From another point of view, however, each person exists only in so far as he/she is not part at all and in so far as nothing is separated from him-/herself (“er ist nur, insofern er kein Teil ist, und nichts von ihm abgesondert”).¹⁰⁷ In fact, Hegel maintains, the above points of view are both correct; they are just another aspect of the same thing. “The concept of individuality” (“Der Begriff der Individualität”) itself includes “opposition” (“Entgegensetzung”) to an infinite variety of individualities as well as an “association” or “connection” (“Verbindung”) with them. One may conceive of the human being in distinction from society; yet the human being derives his/her identity from the customs and practices of the social community in which he/she lives. It is best to conceive of life as undivided, in which case individuals are “expressions” (“Äußerungen”) or “representations” (“Darstellungen”)¹⁰⁸ of that life. The problem is that “reflection” (“die Reflexion”) crystallizes or “fixes” (“fixiert”) “individual lives” into stable (“ruhende”), subsistent (“bestehende”) and firmly “fixed points” (“feste Punkte”).¹⁰⁹ It is for this reason that Hegel criticizes philosophy in this fragment; for philosophy is a way of “thinking” (“ein Denken”) that implies an opposition with the “non-thinking” (“Nichtdenkens”) as well

106 *Ibid.* S. 346.

107 *Ibid.*

108 Although “representations” is a literal translation of the German word “Darstellungen”, Knox may have a good point when he translates it as “manifestations”, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 310.

109 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 346.

as an opposition of that which thinks (“Denkenden”) and that which is thought (“Gedachten”).¹¹⁰ However, Hegel has in mind a one-sided conception of philosophy here, in particular the philosophy of the “understanding” (“*Verstand*”).¹¹¹ Kantianism is one such philosophy. It is predicated on a sharp distinction between “subject” and “object”, the “finite” and the “infinite”, “humans” and “God”, precisely the oppositions that Hegel attempts to unite. Still in 1800, when he was writing this fragment, Hegel considered religion, in the sense of *Volksreligion*,¹¹² to be the solution to all these oppositions.

Diese Erhebung des Menschen ... vom endlichen Leben zum unendlichen Leben – ist Religion.¹¹³

[This elevation of the human being ... from finite life to infinite life – is religion.]

Therefore, philosophy would rather stop short of religion (“Die Philosophie muß eben darum mit der Religion aufhören”).¹¹⁴ It took Hegel some time to conceptualize a philosophy that would be able to overcome the “delusions” (“Täuschungen”) of the philosophy of the *Verstand*. However, already in

110 *Ibid.* S. 348.

111 See Hegel’s *Differenzschrift* for the contradistinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. G. W. F. Hegel, “Differenzschrift des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie”, in G. Lasson (ed.), *Erste Druckschriften* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1928), SS. 1–113; trans. H. S. Harris and W. Cerf, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977). *Verstand* is the analytical thinking that breaks reality down into its elements, while failing to synthesize these into a unity. *Vernunft*, on the other hand, is precisely this synthesizing faculty that perceives the interconnections between different aspects of reality. The *Verstand* attempts to clothe its activities with the semblance of *Vernunft* in two ways: firstly, through reflection in isolation (“Reflexion als Instrument des Philosophierens”, *Differenzschrift*, SS. 17–21); secondly, through common sense (“Verhältnis der Spekulation zum gesunden Menschenverstand”, *ibid.* SS. 21–25).

112 See the Tübingen essay on “*Volksreligion und Christentum*”, where the distinction between the cold calculations of the “*Verstand*” and a “religion of the heart” is made.

113 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 347.

114 *Ibid.* S. 348.

this fragment Hegel introduced the concept upon which the whole of his later philosophical system would be based, that is, *Geist*.

Das unendliche Leben kann man einen Geist nennen, im Gegensatz “zu” der abstrakten Vielheit ... denn alsdann wäre er die bloße Einheit, die Gesetz heißt und ein bloß Gedachtes, Unlebendiges ist. *Der Geist ist lebendiges Gesetz in Vereinigung mit dem Mannigfaltigen, das alsdann ein belebtes ist.*¹¹⁵

[One can call infinite life a spirit, in contrast with the abstract multiplicity ... for in that case spirit would be the bare unity, which is called law and [which] is a bare thought, stripped of life. *Spirit is an animating law in union with the manifold, which is then something animated.*]

115 *Ibid.* S. 347 (my italics for emphasis).

I “The Tübingen Fragment”: From Moral Philosophy to Normative Social Theory

The focus of this chapter is the young Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's engagement with Immanuel Kant's practical philosophy and the complementary development of his own notion of “popular religion” (*Volksreligion*)¹ as the vehicle of the moral cultivation of society in “The Tübingen Fragment”, written in 1793, the earliest of Hegel's so-called “theological” youth writings. It will be shown that Hegel's notion of a popular religion departed from Kant's practical philosophy and was envisioned as the means of realizing practical reason in the sensible world. It will be argued that this project led Hegel to transcend the strict dualism underpinning Kant's thought, which separates morality from the empirical world and society. Hegel's notion of popular religion thus comes to function as both a continuation *and* a critique of Kant's practical philosophy; and marks the transition from moral philosophy to normative social theory.²

- 1 *Volksreligion* may alternatively be translated as “people's” “public” or “folk-” religion. I have opted for “popular religion” to emphasize Hegel's stated intention of popularizing the principles of rational religion. Harris translates the concept as “folk-religion”, which has been changed to popular religion in all citations from his translation for the sake of conceptual clarity. For an informative analysis of the disjuncture of Latin and Germanic concepts of “the people” see Barbara Cassin (ed.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 755–757.
- 2 Hegel's transition from philosophy to social theory was first commented upon by Herbert Marcuse in *Reason and Revolution*. However, this brilliant work did not engage with “The Tübingen Fragment” apart from a single disconnected quote, focusing primarily on Hegel's later works and thus missing the crucial transition from a distinctly Kantian *moral* philosophy towards a *normative* social theory, as well as the concomitant development of the concept of popular religion. It is the ambition of this chapter to address precisely this highly original development in the earliest known

Hegel's incomplete text bears the indelible marks of a young thinker reflecting on his studies and attempting to develop his own position, progressing in leaps and bounds, changing his position, crossing out lines etc. There is nothing to suggest that the author intended to publish the manuscript, not even bothering to provide the collection of pages with a title. However, this should not be taken to suggest that Hegel abandoned the text; he maintained erudite records from the age of fourteen and onwards, which according to H. S. Harris reveal a remarkable consistency in terms of themes and analysis – in spite of the more obvious developments of his thought.³ Most notably, “The Tübingen Fragment” contains Hegel's first known engagement with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and concomitant reflections on the social and political role of religion, both of which would remain consistent points of reference throughout his works and the themes of the present chapter.⁴

The manuscript was first published by Herman Nohl in his 1907 collection *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* [Hegel's theological youth writings].⁵ H. S. Harris subsequently translated the text into English in an appendix to his magisterial *Towards the Sunlight* (1972), which will serve as the main point of reference throughout this chapter.⁶ The manuscript remained untitled in Nohl's collection, but subsequently became known as either “The Tübingen Fragment” or alternatively “Religion ist eine”, based on Gisela Schuler and Heinz Kimmerle's practice of identifying Hegel's

part of Hegel's so-called theological youth writings. See Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1968), p. 32.

3 Henry Siltan Harris, *Hegel's Development: Towards the Sunlight 1770–1801* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 4–5.

4 Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics* (London: Merlin Press, 1975), pp. xiv, 16.

5 Herman Nohl (ed.), *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften: Nach den Handschriften der Kgl. Bibliothek in Berlin* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1907), SS. 1–29. Note that there are a number of pages missing in the surviving manuscript.

6 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Religion ist eine”, in H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight, 1770–1801* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 481–507.

untitled fragments by their opening phrase.⁷ The remainder of this chapter, however, will refer to the manuscript as "The Tübingen Fragment" rather than perpetuate the other relatively misleading title.⁸

In spite of this designation, the text was, in all likelihood, penned during a visit to Stuttgart between July and September 1793; but even if the title does not correspond to the text's geographical genesis, it does reflect its intellectual origins in Hegel's training at the protestant seminary in Tübingen, in particular his studies of Immanuel Kant's philosophy and rational theology. Hegel commenced his studies in October 1788 and graduated in the autumn of 1793, receiving training in philosophy and theology complemented by radical ideas from France, which were popular amongst the student body. Hegel seems to have been relatively alienated from the strict, disciplinary institution, as well as the abstract study of theology and metaphysics, which he would proceed to criticize at length in the manuscript. His antipathy towards this form of study likewise seems to have tempered his first encounter with Kant's critical philosophy at the seminary. However, after 1792 he pivoted and developed a profound interest in Kant's works.⁹ According to Harris, Hegel spent the mainstay of the summer of 1793 in Stuttgart studying the works of Kant and Fichte, while developing his own complementary conception of popular religion, which he had briefly touched upon in a prior school essay "*Über die Religion der Griechen und Römer*" ["On the religion of the Greeks and Romans"] in 1787.¹⁰

7 Harris, *Towards the Sunlight*, p. xiii. Harris himself adopts this practice referring to his English translation as "Religion ist eine"; thus it will also figure as such in the references to this translation.

8 "Religion ist eine" is a misleading title insofar as it does not adequately reflect the contents of the manuscript nor even the first sentence, which reads: "Religion ist eine der wichtigsten Ungelegenheiten unsere Lebens", that is, religion is one of the most important concerns of our life.

9 Harris, *Towards the Sunlight*, pp. 68, 107–108.

10 *Ibid.* pp. 116, 30. Note that the contents of this early essay remains almost entirely irrelevant for our present purposes and will not be addressed in the course of the present chapter.

“The Tübingen Fragment”, which he completed during this period in Stuttgart, contains some early reflections on the lessons at the Tübingen seminary including his first engagement with Kant’s moral philosophy and the development of his own idea of a “popular religion” acting as the vehicle of its realization in the world. The manuscript criticizes the theological doctrines and dogma Hegel had been studying at the seminary: while he agreed with their content, which he identified primarily with Kant’s idea of practical reason, he argued that they remained abstract to the general populace and therefore could not inspire them to behave accordingly and thus, ultimately, attain the realization of (practical) reason in the world. The achievement of this goal required that religion become “wholly subjective”, that is to say, a living, sensible set of principles, which would translate directly into moral predispositions and actions of the people.¹¹ The vehicle of such general moral and political progress was what he described as “popular religion”.

The argument of this chapter is that Hegel’s conceptualization of popular religion in “The Tübingen Fragment” functions as both a continuation *and* a critique of Kant’s moral philosophy. On the one hand, the principles of popular religion coincide with Kant’s moral philosophy; on the other hand, the necessity of the institution of popular religion simultaneously challenges and transcends the dualism of the aforementioned. Hegel’s conception of popular religion thus marks the shift from (Kantian) moral philosophy towards a normative social theory, which it is the aim of this chapter to explicate and analyse. In order to elucidate this transition and the contents of Hegel’s early normative social theory, it will be necessary to revisit his starting point, that is Immanuel Kant’s works, before proceeding to examine the young Hegel’s critical engagement with and beyond them including his complementary development of the notion of “popular religion” in the final two sections.

11 Hegel, “Religion ist eine”, p. 486.

Kant's (Im-)practical Philosophy

*Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and steadily one reflects on them: The Starry heaven above me and the moral law within me.*¹²

This frequently cited passage from the conclusion to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) neatly summarized his preoccupation with modern science and morality, which constituted the main themes of his philosophy. Kant sought to provide a metaphysical foundation for both *and* ensure their mutual compatibility, in spite of their seemingly contradictory presuppositions of universal causation and human freedom.

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; second edition 1787) started from the "crisis of metaphysics". On the one hand, dogmatic metaphysics, represented by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Christian Wolff (1679–1754), had overextended speculative reason into the realm of the supersensible claiming to deduce knowledge of God, the immortal soul and freedom, bringing it into disrepute. On the other hand, sceptics, namely David Hume, had responded by rejecting the possibility of universally valid judgements such as causation and scientific laws. Hume famously argued that such judgements were simply extrapolations from experience, too particular to have universal validity in the manner of scientific laws.¹³

12 Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Practical Reason", in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 5: 161 [italics in original]. Kant is most likely referring to Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), which was translated into German in 1755 and widely read; see David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). In line with prevailing academic standards, all references to Kant, with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cite volume and page number of the German standard edition of Kant's collected works. References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* indicate edition (first and second indicated by A or B) followed by the pagination presented in the same manner as the aforementioned.

13 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. A: ix/B: 19–20.

Kant believed that this crisis had been provoked by the dogmatic or “uncritical” application of pure reason to areas that were outside of its legitimate purview. In order to save metaphysics from itself, it was necessary to conduct a critique of pure reason; to delimit and thereby secure its authority within its legitimate domain. Kant conceded to the sceptics, that cognition and knowledge originated with experience, and that the particularity of experience could not support the universal claims of science. However, saying that cognition comes from experience does not entail that it is limited to this: Kant argued that cognition presupposes forms of sensible intuition (space and time) and understanding (the categories) which structure and render sensory input intelligible to us.¹⁴ These *a priori* forms are not deduced from experience, but exist independently thereof, as the necessary and universal precondition of experience. Kant proposed that this innate structure of experience could be known through the use of pure reason and that this constituted the proper domain of metaphysics. He suggested that it was possible to adduce a number of synthetic *a priori* judgements from this, that could support causation and scientific laws, insofar as they allow us to deduce a limited number of concepts such as causation, which are both universal and necessary, insofar as they are the condition of possibility of our experience and knowledge of the world.¹⁵

In this self-proclaimed “Copernican Revolution”, Kant reoriented philosophy from the object, to the necessary form the object must take within our experience. This shift allowed him to maintain the possibility of universally valid judgements including causation and scientific laws, based on the structure of human cognition.¹⁶ However, this reorientation also involved a significant delimitation of the scope of human knowledge. Insofar as synthetic *a priori* judgements arise from and refer solely to human experience, they cannot legitimately claim to extend beyond this domain.

14 *Ibid.* p. B: xxv–xxvi, 2.

15 A synthetic *a priori* judgement is a statement where the predicate tells us something that is not contained in the subject and thus tells us something new, unlike analytic *a priori* judgements, which simply elucidate what is already contained in the premise.

16 *Ibid.* p. B: xvi–bxix. Alternatively referred to as the realm of sensibility and intelligibility.

They can only ever be valid with regard to how objects appear to us in our experience (phenomena), and cannot tell us anything about how they may be independently of this (noumena).¹⁷ In other words, our knowledge of the world must be understood as precisely that: *our* knowledge of the world, not to be mistaken for the world itself. In this way, Kant's metaphysical grounding of the principles of natural science simultaneously limited it to the world of appearances.

This delimitation, not only challenged the dogmatic assumption of the correspondence between our concepts and the world, it also entailed that the traditional metaphysical preoccupation with the supersensible; the soul, god, freedom etc. had to be abandoned, insofar as neither of these fall within the realm of possible experience. This allows us to understand Kant's otherwise confusing metaphor of the "Copernican Revolution": the shift from the ptolemaic model of the universe to the heliocentric, confusingly appears to refer to the displacement of the human observer from the centre of the cosmos, but should rather be understood in terms of the historical supersession of a dogmatic metaphysical worldview by human reason and science.

This is, of course, not to suggest that Kant denied the existence of the soul or God, only that he insisted that they remain beyond the grasp of pure reason. In *Critique of Practical Reason* he asserted that we can and must accept them as necessary postulates of practical reason, even if we can never verify them as metaphysical truths. In "The Tübingen Fragment", Hegel proceeded to suggest that these postulates alongside providence formed the only positive doctrinal content of rational religion.¹⁸

The distinction between appearances and the things in themselves, allowed Kant to resolve the seeming contradiction between the presuppositions of modern science and morality respectively, that is, universal causality and free will.¹⁹ According to Kant, causality is attributed to phenomena by the mind. It is not a knowable attribute of the thing in itself: "an effect can therefore be regarded as free in regards to its intelligible cause,

17 *Ibid.* p. B: xvi–xxvi.

18 Hegel, "Religion ist eine", p. 487.

19 *Ibid.* p. A: 558/B: 586.

and yet simultaneously, in regard to appearances, as their result according to the necessity of nature.”²⁰ In other words, a human being may appear to be subject to causal determination in our experience, and at the same time be thought of as (noumenally) free without any contradiction. However, establishing the freedom of the will remained beyond the capacities of pure reason and was forfeited to practical reason.²¹

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) Kant proceeded to identify practical reason with the will.²² He defined the will as the spontaneous and rational deliberation about what we ought to do.²³ He did not consider such deliberations separate from the actions that follow, going as far as to call the will the “causality of reason”.²⁴ Freedom is the presupposition of practical reason; in practical reasoning, that is, deliberations about what one ought to do, it is assumed that one actually has that choice and is not determined by outside forces (heteronomy) – otherwise such deliberation would be entirely meaningless. Freedom, in this negative sense, means being exempt from external causes. Taken together with the previous definition of the will as the causality of reason, this results in a conception of the free will as a cause without a cause.

Kant’s negative definition of freedom, as the exemption of the will from external causes, led him towards a positive definition of freedom as autonomy. Since freedom consists in freely willing maxims of action in accordance with the dictates of our reason, it also means legislating and following the moral law, which Kant derived from practical reason, in the form of the categorical imperative(s). According to Kant, the moral law does not interfere with freedom in the negative sense, since we make it ourselves – it is derived from practical reason, that is, the will – as such

20 *Ibid.* p. A: 537/B: 565.

21 *Ibid.* pp. B: xxiv–xxix.

22 Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals”, in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

In line with his prior assertions, see p. 4: 412; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A: 533/B: 561.

23 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. AK4: 447.

24 Kant, “Groundwork”, p. 4: 461.

the moral law is quite simply the principle of freedom.²⁵ This is the reason Kant concluded that a free will and a moral will "are one and the same".²⁶

The will, understood as practical reason, presupposes freedom for both its emergence and actualization, yet the premise of practical reason means that freedom must conform to the moral law or cease to exist, since acting contrary to the dictates of the moral law is to be determined by forces external to reason (heteronomy). Kant, for instance, speaks of animal instincts and impulses, as a reference to causally determined existence in the natural/sensible world. Freedom either conforms to practical reason or it is not.²⁷ This becomes even clearer in the subsequent *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), where Kant makes practical reason primary in regards to freedom, deducing the latter from the moral law, which is given to us as a "fact of reason".²⁸ For Kant, free will is not the same as free choice. Freedom is consistently rendered as the freedom to do the right thing. This conception of freedom may contradict common-sense notions of freedom, but this is exactly Kant's point: human freedom does not mean moral lawlessness. On the contrary, human freedom consists in the will legislating and following the universal moral law.

In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant proceeded to add a proto-social dimension to the moral law – the hypothetical "kingdom of ends" ["*Reich der Zwecke*"]. Kant defines "kingdom" as a "systematic union of various rational beings through common laws". Since the maxims

25 The concept of autonomy is a compound of the Ancient Greek terms *auto* meaning "self" and *nomos* meaning "law" and is commonly understood to denote self-legislation and/as freedom.

26 Kant, "Groundwork", p. 4: 447.
Kant would later distinguish *Willkür* [arbitrariness] the human capacity for choice from *Wille* [the will], which maintain the same characteristics described above.

27 Kant, "Groundwork", p. 4: 444; Kant, "Critique of Practical Reason", p. 5: 61.
This has clear parallels to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's pronouncements in *The Social Contract*, which influenced Kant greatly: "The impulse of mere appetite is slavery, while obedience to a self-prescribed law is liberty"; see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1998), pp. 19–20.

28 Kant, "Critique of Practical Reason", p. 5: 30–32.

of the free will must be universalizable, free wills can coexist in rational and harmonious union. “Ends” here refers to the formulation of the categorical imperative, which states that a rational being must “treat himself and all others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves”, which Kant rephrases as “every rational being must act as if he were by his maxims at all times a law-giving member of the universal kingdom of ends”. The “kingdom of ends”, in other words, is the free and harmonious coexistence of rational individuals, according to the moral law – which is freely legislated and followed by all. Kant admits that this is only an ideal that can be used as a regulative hypothetical, but then hastens to add that “such a kingdom of ends would actually come into existence through maxims whose rule the categorical imperative prescribes to all rational beings if they were universally followed”. The “kingdom of ends”, in other words, designates the realization of reason in the sensible world.²⁹

Kant had thus managed to establish the theoretical possibility of freedom and a basic outline of the form it ought to take, though he provided precious few practical propositions. However, this should not be taken to suggest that he was indifferent to its realization. On the contrary, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790) he explicitly asserted “the latter [realm of intelligibility] *should* have an influence on the former [realm of the sensible], namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world.”³⁰ This passage clearly reveals the normative impetus that motivated Kant’s philosophy: noumenal freedom *ought* to institute the “kingdom of ends” in the sensible world.³¹

29 Humanity is, of course, potentially subject to infinite improvement see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. B: 374; Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), p. 7: 88.

30 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 5: 176 [emphasis added]; cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties* (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), p. 39.

31 These hopes are particularly evident in Kant’s attempts to develop a progressive theory of history in *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784) and *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795) although their relationship to his practical philosophy remains complicated.

The problem that remained was the practical attainment of this aim. The structure of Kant's philosophy entailed that the realization of (practical) reason in the sensible world, hinged on the mediation of the (noumenal) subjective will, which is, per definition, not subject to causation. Kant addressed the problem of making "the objectively practical laws of pure reason subjectively practical", that is, "the method of founding and cultivating genuine moral dispositions", briefly towards the end of *Critique of Practical Reason*.³² Paradoxically, this short passage only reveals the inherently impractical and individualistic nature of Kant's practical philosophy. Kant immediately came up against the dualistic structure of his own thought: since the will belongs to the realm of intelligibility, it was impossible to conceive of any (sensible) challenges to its realization, let alone solutions to such problems. Ultimately, his practical advice amounted to the individual "rais[ing] oneself altogether above the sensible world [...] so that gradually the greatest, but purely moral, interest in it may be produced" – ignoring precisely the sensible world in which it had to be attained, thus leaving an incommensurable gap between is and ought at the heart of Kant's practical philosophy.³³

Religion and/as Moral Philosophy

A few years later a young Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel would pick up whence Kant left and attempt to work out a way of realizing reason in the world. The young Hegel was heavily preoccupied with Kant, and took the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which had been published while he was studying at Tübingen, as his point of departure. In "The Tübingen Fragment" Hegel attempted to identify an appropriate means of translating objective morality into a subjective disposition, so that practical reason might be realized in the sensible world. He followed Kant's suggestion in *Religion*

32 Kant, "Critique of Practical Reason", p. 5: 153.

33 *Ibid.* p. 5: 159.

within the Boundaries of Mere Reason (1793) that religion coincided with pure practical reason, suggesting that an institution of popular religion should serve as the vehicle of the moral cultivation of society and thereby the realization of reason in the sensible realm.³⁴

“The Tübingen Fragment” commences with Hegel’s identification of religion as an absolutely central social institution and “one of the most important concerns of our life”. The essence of religion is practical reason and may, if deployed correctly, become “the mainsprings of action, sources of knowledge (of) our duties, and sources of solace”. Hegel’s primary concern in the text is the optimal deployment and development of religion, so as to realize its moral content in society, that is, overcoming the gap between “is” and “ought”, in which Kant’s moral philosophy is entangled. However, Hegel’s concern was not primarily religious but social and political; he insisted that the realization of reason through the institution of popular religion coincided with social and political freedom.³⁵

After the initial pages of the introduction, Hegel proceeds to provide a brief elucidation of the objective of the text: he announces that he does not set out to search for the most appealing form of religion, but in order to identify the prerequisite institutions that will render the rational content of religion (practical reason) a living principle embodied and enacted by the individuals constituting society.

It is not my object to investigate what religious doctrines are most appealing to the heart, (or) most apt to elevate and give comfort to the soul – not how the doctrines of a religion should be constituted in order to make a people better and happier – but rather to inquire what institutions are requisite in order that the doctrines and the force of religion should enter into the web of human feelings, become associated with human impulses to action, and prove living and active in them in order that religion should become wholly subjective.³⁶

34 Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 6: 13.

35 Hegel, “Religion ist eine”, p. 505.

36 *Ibid.* p. 486.

As the text progresses it gradually becomes clear that these prerequisites are in fact the most appealing doctrines and forms of religion, which he refers to as "popular religion". Moreover, the purpose of popular religion rendering religion "wholly subjective" is eventually revealed to be precisely the ennoblement of the people so that they may attain freedom.

The movement towards the merger of these immediately opposed objectives in the course of the text's development underlines the fact that Hegel's primary motivation in composing this text was self-clarification; and that this document is the surviving textual trace of a young student attempting to work out his ideas on paper, rather than a complete philosophical exposition of his conclusions. This not only helps us work past some of the immediate conceptual and logical inconsistencies; it allows us to better grasp Hegel's argument: the reason that he seems unable to accept these other objectives from the outset, is that the philosophical point of departure remains a Kantian deontological ethic; Hegel therefore cannot immediately admit the relevance of external factors. As the text unfolds and he develops his immanent critique of this Kantian starting point, he becomes capable of formulating and incorporating these objectives in the development of his concept of popular religion.

Before we proceed to examine Hegel's conception of popular religion, it is necessary to first establish and examine Hegel's notion of religion and its relation to what he refers to as "objective" and "subjective" religion. This will help us to grasp the problematic Hegel is responding to with the project of popular religion, namely the inherent impracticality of Kant's practical philosophy and the inefficiency of contemporary religious forms and institutions in rendering objective morality subjective and thus attaining the realization of practical reason. Prior to pursuing these conceptual determinations it is necessary to note that, although we may forgive Hegel the conceptual inconsistencies on account of the text's transitional nature, they necessarily entail a certain degree of imprecision, which will be partially alleviated through careful textual analysis. However, a certain degree of interpretation without decisive textual evidence remains inevitable.

The concept of religion that Hegel develops in the course of "The Tübingen Fragment" is a complex one with many facets, which will be examined in turn. However, Hegel insists that the essential content of

religion is identical to practical reason as elucidated in Kant's works. This identification of religion and practical reason was itself suggested by Kant in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, published around Easter 1793 – before Hegel retreated to Stuttgart to study the works of Kant and Fichte and develop his concept of popular religion. In this work Kant distinguished a core of principles constituting the “pure rational system of religion”, which is the same as practical reason, found in almost all religions.³⁷

In spite of this and the numerous other convergences, it is impossible to establish whether Hegel had read actually the whole book before committing his own thoughts to paper based on the available sources. But we can be almost certain that he had read the first part of the book “On the radical evil in human nature”, published in *Berlinische Monatschrift* already in February of 1792.³⁸ Although Kant is never mentioned by name in the course of “The Tübingen Fragment”, there can be no doubt as to the referent, when Hegel specifies his conception of religion:

I include here under religion only such knowledge of God and immortality as the need of practical reason demands, and all that stands in an easily perceived connection with it.³⁹

In this passage religion is explicitly identified with practical reason, that is, Kant's moral law and what he suggested were the necessary assumptions about the intelligible world, that is, the postulates of practical reason (God, immortality and freedom). These assumptions had to remain postulates insofar as they pertained to the noumenal realm and thus could not be verified. They simply had to be assumed in order to consider questions of morality and practical reason thus insinuating the close interconnection between faith and practical reason.⁴⁰

37 Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, p. 6: 12. In a later passage (6: 106) he proceeds to describe these as “arbitrary precepts”.

38 Harris, *Towards the Sunlight*, p. 108.

39 Hegel, “Religion ist eine”, p. 486.

40 As was similarly suggested by Kant in the introduction to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he explained that he had to “deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith”, see p. B: xxx.

For reasons that are not explicated, Hegel consistently refers to only two of the three postulates of practical reason, namely God and the immortality of the soul.⁴¹ Given that the entire problematic of "The Tübingen Fragment" pertains to the assumption of (noumenal) freedom, it is implausible that Hegel deliberately omitted or disagreed with this postulate. Hegel may not have considered freedom to be an exclusively religious concept and thus left it aside in the elucidation of the essential contents of religion. This would not be without precedence: in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant likewise suggested that freedom was distinct from the other postulates of practical reason. The postulates of God and immortality pertain to the possibility of the moral law and happiness coinciding in the highest good (*summum bonnum*) and cannot be known, whereas freedom is directly related to the possibility of practical reason and as such is implicitly revealed by "the fact of reason."⁴² This seems to be the most plausible explanation for why Hegel did not explicitly include freedom alongside the other postulates of practical reason in his elucidation of the essential contents of religion.⁴³

Hegel supplements the postulates of practical reason with an addition of his own – the belief in divine providence.⁴⁴ While this may be conceived as an extension of the initial postulate of practical reason regarding the existence of God as an omniscient, omnipotent and moral divinity, it goes beyond Kant's original formulations, which did not identify providence as a necessary postulate of practical reason and rational religion, but associated it with historical forms of faith.⁴⁵ Hegel's postulate of providence entails that we must assume that God governs the world in a purposive manner related to moral principles. Hegel insists that this is necessary in order to attain the individual's complete contentment and resignation to God's

41 Hegel, "Religion ist eine", p. 487.

42 Kant, *Practical Reason*, p. 5: 30–32; Hegel, "Religion ist eine", p. 487.

43 We may thus consider the postulate of freedom to be covered by the final clause concerning: "all that stands in an easily perceived connection with [the needs of practical reason]."

44 Hegel, "Religion ist eine", pp. 500–501.

45 Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, p. 6: 135.

will, although he insists that providence does not apply to every miniscule occurrence in our private lives.⁴⁶ Divine providence only pertains to major events and historical developments rather than individual hardships.⁴⁷

Hegel argues that the essential content of religion, that is, practical reason, is the same for all religions and denominations, which are only distinguishable by their official dogmas and doctrines:

[A] few fundamental propositions lie at the base of every religion; they are merely modified or deformed to a greater or lesser degree in the different religions, expressed more or less purely – they constitute the basis of all the faith and all the hopes that religion offers to us.⁴⁸

The obvious variations in terms of theological dogma and doctrines – or what Hegel calls “objective religion”, which we will return to shortly – all articulate the same fundamental moral content more or less appropriately. Hegel thus insists on various historical religions being united by a set of common principles and postulates and thus eschews sectarian arrogance, while maintaining the capacity to differentiate between them.⁴⁹ This explains why Hegel consistently discusses “religion” rather than Christianity or Protestantism, as well as his frequent invocation of ancient Greece.

In spite of this very basic and almost universal definition of religion as identical to practical reason, this should not be taken to imply that the religious elements can be ignored or that religion can be reduced to reason in the conventional sense of the term. Just as practical reason in Kant’s analysis presupposes certain (religious) postulates, Hegel’s account of practical reason cannot be abstracted from a similar set of religious assumption:

46 Hegel, “Religion ist eine”, pp. 500–501.

47 While Hegel does not address the relationship between freedom and divine providence in the course of “The Tübingen Fragment”, it could easily be resolved along the lines of Kant’s argument regarding the coincidence of freedom and submission to the moral law outlined previously.

48 Hegel, “Religion ist eine”, p. 485. Note that Kant made a similar argument in *Religion*.

49 See in particular *ibid.* pp. 487–488.

"practical reason requires faith in a Deity – [and] in immortality."⁵⁰ Hegel explains that "religion gives to morality and its motive powers a new and more exalted light, it furnishes a new and a more solid barrier against the might of the sensual impulses."⁵¹ The religious component of practical reason motivates and moves the subject to follow the moral law in a way which it could not achieve on its own.⁵²

Having identified the essential contents of religion, Hegel proceeds to define what he describes as "objective religion". Hegel portrays this primarily as the systematic study of scripture and the knowledge accumulated from these endeavours, but in a number of passages he also includes certain institutionalized ritual practices, although his focus remains theology proper.⁵³ While Hegel admits that objective religion departs from the essential contents of religion, he does not consider the theological dogmas and doctrines of organized (objective) religion essential to religion. He is clear that the mainstay of objective religion remains external to the essential moral and practical contents of religion, which, like practical reason in Kant's conception, is immediately available to the subject upon reflection and as such does not require extended theological instruction or studies:

Nature has buried in every man a seed of the finer feeling that springs from morality, it has placed in him a sense for what is moral, for ends that go beyond the range of mere sense.⁵⁴

50 *Ibid.* p. 487 (square brackets in original). For some reason providence does not figure alongside the other postulates in this particular passage.

51 *Ibid.* pp. 482–483; see also pp. 486, 492.

52 This is a common trait shared by both Kant and Hegel, which Lukács identifies with German Idealism's consistent overestimation of the role of religion in society and history; see *The Young Hegel*, p. 16.

53 See in particular Hegel, "Religion ist eine", pp. 485, 486. Hegel's distinction between religion and objective religion including its associations with theology approximates Johann Gottlieb Fichte's distinction between religion and theology in *Attempt at a Critique of all Revelation* (1792), but may very well have been developed independently, for a further discussion see Harris, *Towards the Sunlight*, p. 129.

54 Hegel, "Religion ist eine", p. 485.

The exegetical excursions of theologians, philosophers and priests are not necessary in order for individuals to arrive at the moral principles that constitute the essential contents of religion, that is, practical reason. At times objective religion even seems to hinder their access to these principles, and thus also their capacity to live and act accordingly:

We are taught objective religion in the schools from our youth up; they stuff our memories with it quite clearly enough, so that often the still immature understanding, the fair and delicate plant of the free and open mind, is borne down by the burden.⁵⁵

Objective religion here functions as a fetter on our immediate access to and use of practical reason: the problem is that objective religion takes the form of external principles and instruction rather than drawing out and developing the immanent morality of the subject.⁵⁶

Hegel's negative evaluation of objective religion, which he at one point goes as far as to suggest is limited to "theology" and "not religion any longer", can hardly be read as anything but an implicit critique of the mode of study and dissemination at the Tübingen seminary.⁵⁷ Yet, however frustrated he might have been, he stops short of formulating an explicit critique akin to Kant's critique of dogmatic metaphysics.⁵⁸ Hegel instead prefers to focus on the practical inefficiency of objective religion in achieving the religious and moral cultivation of the subjects constituting society – what he refers to as "subjective religion". But before we proceed to examine "subjective religion" in detail, it is important to note that Hegel's problem is not with the religious content of objective religion, but with its

55 *Ibid.* p. 485.

56 *Ibid.* pp. 497–498.

57 *Ibid.* p. 484.

Subsequently Hegel nonetheless admits that objective religion departs from and forms part of religion, but he will only concern himself with it to the extent that it forms part of subjective religion, *ibid.* p. 486.

58 However, it should be noted that Hegel echoes Kant's position in relation to dogmatic metaphysics in his insistence on "abstract[ing] absolutely from all scientific or, more precisely, metaphysical knowledge of God, and our relation to him, or that of the whole world". *Ibid.* pp. 485–486.

purely intellectual nature. He, subsequently, formulates a parallel critique of enlightenment rationalism, which promotes the intellect at the expense of religion and its absolutely central appeal to the heart and the feelings.⁵⁹

Whereas "objective religion" refers to intellectual inquiry, knowledge and instruction, "subjective religion expresses itself only in feelings and actions".⁶⁰ What Hegel here describes as "feelings" pertaining to religion denotes the immediate availability of the essential content of religion. Religious feelings signify moral inclinations, which do not require extended intellectual meditation but permeate "every budding branch of human impulse" and thus lends themselves to instantaneous moral orientation and action. As Hegel explains:

[T]he most important issue in subjective religion is whether, and to what extent, the mind is disposed to let itself be controlled by religious motives – how far it is susceptible to religion; and further what kind of images make a special impression on the heart – what kinds of feelings have been the most cultivated and are most easily produced in the soul.⁶¹

"Subjective religion", in other words, refers to religious feelings, that is, the subject's own religious motives and moral dispositions. Hegel explains that at the "moment of decision" not even "the best manual of morality" can ensure that the moral law will prevail; what is needed is religious feelings understood as the immediate inclination to act morally.⁶² "Subjective religion" thus refers to the immediate and practical availability and enactment of the essential moral contents of religion, which cannot be achieved even by the most elaborate works of theology and/or morality associated with "objective religion".

Hegel proceeds to elaborate this distinction between "subjective" and "objective" religion: "subjective religion is fully individuated", whereas "objective religion is abstraction".⁶³ This should not be taken to suggest

59 *Ibid.* pp. 489–494.

60 *Ibid.* p. 484.

61 *Ibid.* p. 485.

62 *Ibid.* p. 490.

63 *Ibid.* p. 484.

that “subjective religion” is not simultaneously a social force. Hegel is very clear that “subjective religion” also constitutes the “ennobling of the spirit of a nation.”⁶⁴ What Hegel is attempting to convey in this passage is that the essential moral content of religion when rendered “wholly subjective” coincides fully with the individual subjects that constitute society, unlike the abstract theological reasoning of objective religion. “Objective religion” is only understood (rather than felt) by a very limited group of professionals and intellectuals and thus remains abstract in the sense of the Latin *abstrahere*, that is, separate from the lives of the majority of society.

It is also clear from this brief passage that the development of Hegel’s thought on the matter proceeds from the individual subject to society, even if the means of attaining this end turn out to be social, that is, the institution of popular religion. This is also the reason why Kant must remain the main point of reference, in spite of the obvious parallels to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s civil religion outlined in *The Social Contract*.⁶⁵ But Rousseau differs insofar as he assumes that society as a rational whole can and should determine the individuals constituting it. Hegel’s immediate methodological individualism is a holdover from Kant, which he gradually overcomes in the course of the text. Hegel’s contribution consists precisely in starting from and then proceeding to supersede Kant’s dualism, which divides the individual (*noumenal*) subject from the sensible world and society.

Hegel’s notion of “subjective religion” must be understood as the equivalent of Kant’s subjective morality, which figured as the realization of objective morality in and through the subject(s) in the form of moral dispositions and behaviour.⁶⁶ Hegel’s project of rendering religion wholly subjective is thus the founding of Kant’s “kingdom of ends”, that is, the

64 *Ibid.* p. 483.

65 Rousseau influenced Kant immensely as previously noted. For Rousseau’s analysis and insistence on the necessity of a civil religion, see Rousseau, *Social Contract*, pp. 129–138.

66 It should however be noted that Kant’s concept of objective morality does not correspond to Hegel’s notion of objective religion. Objective morality is roughly equivalent of what Hegel identifies as religion and/or the essential contents of religion, that is, practical reason and its necessary postulates.

systematic union of rational individual subjects through common moral laws. But, whereas Kant's dualism only allowed him to propose this as a regulative ideal to consider in regards to individual behaviour, Hegel's aim is precisely its practical achievement. This project presupposes the moral cultivation of society, which was to be achieved by what Hegel refers to as popular religion.

Popular Religion and the Realization of Reason

Having worked through the distinction between "objective" and "subjective" religion, Hegel proceeds to outline the vehicle for attaining "subjective religion", that is, the realization of practical reason in the sensible world. This vehicle is what he refers to as popular religion and defines in the following manner:

[T]he concepts of God and immortality and all that goes with them, so far as they make up the conviction of a people, and so far as they influence the actions and mode of thought of a people – and further there belongs to it also the means whereby these ideas are on the one hand taught to the people, and on the other hand enabled to penetrate their hearts.⁶⁷

It is evident that "popular" religion denotes the essential principles of religion insofar as they can be efficiently disseminated and made wholly subjective amongst the entire populace. In this way, "popular" religion resembles "subjective" religion, but refers primarily to the process and means of achieving it. "Popular" religion is the vehicle, which is to achieve the goal of "subjective" religion. Already here it is possible to detect Hegel's gradual transition from moral philosophy towards normative social theory; from abstract individual reflection towards the organization of collective

67 Hegel, "Religion ist eine", p. 483.

Note that this specific passage actually refers to "public religion", which Hegel uses interchangeably with popular religion at certain points in the text.

change in the sensible world, which becomes even clearer as he proceeds to elaborate his conception of popular religion.⁶⁸

Hegel further refines his definition of popular religion, suggesting that this vehicle of moral and social change must fulfil the following criteria:

- I Its doctrines must be grounded on universal reason.
- II Fancy, heart and sensibility must not thereby go empty away.
- III It must be so constituted that all the needs of life – the public affairs of state are tied in with it.⁶⁹

These three points effectively elucidate the three main components of the young Hegel's programme for the realization of reason: first, the Kantian foundation, second, the transgression of Kant's separation of the intelligible and the sensible worlds, and, third, the socialization and politicization of this project, which will be treated in turn in the following.

The first criterion cements Hegel's identification of religion and practical reason, which is consistently identified as both the principle and aim of popular religion throughout "The Tübingen Fragment". Whereas Hegel previously argued that the basic tenets of practical reason were to be found in all religions, his explication of popular religion proceeds from practical reason, suggesting its primacy in relation to existing theological dogmas. Hegel, for instance, insists that:

[E]ven if their authority rests on a divine revelation the doctrines must necessarily be so constituted that they are authorized really by the universal reason of mankind.⁷⁰

Hegel is clear in this passage that the legitimacy of popular religion consists in its coincidence with practical reason, rather than with established

68 Hegel admits that "The Tübingen Fragment" treats popular religion "objectively"; in a manner reminiscent of objective religion. This is no contradiction, but simply a reminder that this analysis is not part of the phenomenon it seeks to elucidate and create – nor should it be evaluated as such, *ibid.* p. 499.

69 *Ibid.* p. 499.

70 *Ibid.*

religious principles.⁷¹ However, despite his insistence on the centrality of practical reason, it is necessary to recall his implicit critique of the inefficiency of abstract moral and religious principles, with regard to the project of realizing these principles in the sensible world, which accounts for the transition to the second criterion:

Just as [on the one hand] pure morality must in the abstract be sharply distinguished from sensibility in a system of morals, since sensibility is placed far below it – even so [on the other hand] in dealing with human nature and human life in general we must take particular account of man's sensibility, his dependence on external and internal nature, upon his surroundings and the environment in which he lives and upon the sense impulses and blind instinct – the nature of man, is, as it were, only pregnant with the ideas of reason.⁷²

In this brief passage we find the most succinct expression of Hegel's highly original engagement with and transformation of Kant and the concomitant transition from moral philosophy towards a normative social theory. Here Hegel starts out from Kant's strict separation of the intelligible and the sensible world only to transgress it immediately thereafter. This is the logical implication that Hegel deduces from Kant's initial ambition of realizing reason in the sensible world. If popular religion is to overcome the impediments to the realization of reason associated with mankind's empirical and sensible existence, it first of all has to take it seriously and itself take on a sensible form, that is, popular religion.

Hegel proposes: "when we are discussing how to influence men, we must take them as they are".⁷³ This points to the fundamental problematic Hegel is responding to: namely, to the fact that, even if practical reason, is immediately available to all subjects upon reflection, this does not guarantee their enactment of it, insofar as they are not just pure moral agents, but

71 Thus lending some credence to Lukács's otherwise rather confounding claim that Hegel's so-called theological youth writings (including "The Tübingen Fragment") constitute a consistent Enlightenment critique of the Christian Religion and feudal despotism, see Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, pp. 9, 12.

72 Hegel, "Religion ist eine", p. 482 (square brackets in original).

73 *Ibid.* pp. 497, 496.

also sensible and empirical beings influenced by the sensible and empirical world – and when we look to this world it is evident that people are not living in accordance with the dictates of practical reason. This empirical fact must be the starting point of the project of popular religion, which aims to change this state of affairs.

Whereas Kant's immediate moral philosophy was accomplished through abstraction from the sensible world, the project of popular reason must take men as they are, that is, consider both their immanent access to practical reason and the numerous empirical and sensible influences, which contribute to shaping their behaviour – for better and worse. Hegel proceeds to outline the basic contours of his underlying philosophical anthropology of mankind's empirical existence, proposing that "we are obliged to admit that sensibility [i.e. the needs and pleasures of the senses] is the principal factor in all the action and striving of men".⁷⁴ The task of popular religion, that is, to realize (practical) reason in and through the sensible world, must thus take the form of an appeal to the sensibility of mankind, which can draw out and develop their immanent morality.

Here Hegel moves beyond the bounds of Kant's moral philosophy and its exclusive focus on noumenal freedom and morality, which could only succeed insofar as it was entirely separate from all sensible influences. But, while practical reason belongs to the intelligible realm, the project of its realization in the sensible world means that we must consider what sensible form this might take; the immediate answer is moral behaviour. Moral behaviour might be motivated by moral law or various empirical influences, such as social influences or habit – we simply cannot know given the limitations imposed on our knowledge by Kant's strict separation of the intelligible and sensible realms. This also means that the realization of (practical) reason in the sensible world cannot be distinguished from identical instances motivated by sensible or social influences – and in terms of realizing reason in the sensible world, it does not make a difference. The only possible object of the realization of reason in the sensible world is

74 *Ibid.* p. 482 (square brackets in original).

moral behaviour rather than the underlying (and fundamentally unknowable) noumenal motivation.

Hegel assumes the implications fully, concluding that religion is not merely a matter of "rational knowledge" but also, and perhaps more importantly, "a matter of the heart, it has an influence on our feelings and the determination of our will".⁷⁵ Hegel thus proceeds to propose that popular religion must leverage all the sensible and social influences that might promote moral behaviour, understood as the realization of reason in the sensible world. Having identified sensibility as the primary factor in human behaviour he proceeds to suggest that popular religion should use "impressive ceremonies" to appeal to the sensibility alongside "myths" that might serve to inculcate the principles of practical reason in the popular imagination, so that they may "enter into the web of human feelings, become associated with human impulses to action, and prove living and active in them".⁷⁶

It is not immediately clear whether this moral improvement pertains to the noumenal subject or remains limited to its empirical instantiation. In the beginning of the manuscript he insists that popular religion's sensible encouragement of moral behaviour does not "directly" increase freedom, but towards the end, he proceeds to argue that "popular religion – which generates and nourishes noble dispositions – goes hand in hand with freedom".⁷⁷ Freedom is consistently used in a Kantian sense throughout the manuscript and must thus be understood in terms of a noumenal freedom, which is identical to the moral law. We may thus conclude that popular religion's sensible influence on mankind may not only attain the realization of reason in the sensible world, but also gradually or indirectly contribute to the moral improvement of the noumenal subject(s); thus rendering the moral law "wholly subjective" – in both the sensible and intelligible

75 *Ibid.* p. 482.

76 *Ibid.* pp. 502, 486. This is in sharp contrast to Kant's critique of church rituals as spectacles that distract the individual from focusing on his/her own moral conduct, see Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, pp. 6, 193–200.

77 Hegel, "Religion ist eine", pp. 497, 505.

realms.⁷⁸ Popular religion can thus be conceived as a mediator between the intelligible and the sensible realms; it is the empirical means of cultivating the moral predispositions of the subjects constituting society, so that moral law and their empirical existence can be brought into harmony and the contradiction between “is” and “ought” can finally be overcome.

Hegel proceeds to exceed the bounds of the Kantian paradigm in another important regard, insofar as he socializes the question of morality. In a number of passages explicating the third criterion of popular religions, he reveals that the object popular religion is no longer the individual moral agent, but the “spirit of the people” (*Volksgeist*).⁷⁹ Although Kant briefly considered the social dimension of morality in the form of the hypothetical “kingdom of ends”, this was primarily employed as a regulative ideal and an illustration of the compatibility of individual morality and social existence. For Kant, morality remained an individual commitment rather than a social issue. Hegel thus performs an immanent critique which continues Kant’s project, while simultaneously transcending it; he proceeds from moral philosophy towards normative social theory in order to complete Kant’s ambition of realizing reason in the sensible world.

The “spirit of the people” consists in the general level of development of a specific people’s religion, historical traditions and political freedom – three factors, which, Hegel insists, are inherently intertwined and cannot be treated in isolation.⁸⁰ Hegel’s third criterion of popular religion, in other words, must be taken to suggest that popular religion has to embrace all aspects of the life and spirit of the people and not just attend to their individual moral dispositions, as did Kant’s moral philosophy. The moral betterment of the individual subject is tied to his or her empirical and

78 It is worth noting that it is not without precedent in Kant’s own thought. In his lectures on anthropology, he suggested that the pretence and/or appearance [*Schein*] of moral behaviour could help promote genuine moral dispositions. However, these lectures were not published until 1798 and would not have been available to Hegel at the time of writing, see Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 7, 151–153.

79 Hegel, “Religion ist eine”, p. 506.

80 *Ibid.* p. 506.

social existence and thereby society more broadly, and can only develop in tandem with it. The moral improvement of the individual, therefore, cannot be accomplished without the collective improvement of the most central aspects of the people's lives, that is, their religion, traditions and politics. Popular religion must therefore become a living set of principles, embodied in these aspects of people's lives. Hegel insists:

As soon as there is a dividing wall between life and doctrine [...] there arises the suspicion that the form of religion is defective – either it is too much occupied with idle word-games or it demands a level of piety from men that is hypocritical because it is too high.⁸¹

Hegel here builds on the dictum we previously examined, that is, that popular religion must consider people's level of moral (cultural and political) cultivation and work from there in order to develop them, rather than seeking refuge in the inefficient moral abstractions of objective religion.⁸² Popular religion must therefore be orientated towards and integrate the central aspects of the life and spirit of the people in its attempts to improve them. Thus, the moral cultivation of the people is and must also become a project of social and political development.

Thus, we come to an understanding of popular religion as Hegel's outline of the optimal means of rendering objective morality wholly subjective; this is "subjective religion" and identifies the coincidence of empirical existence and noumenal freedom. Popular religion is the mediation of this constitutive division through the appeal to, and development of, the sensibility and sociability of the subject(s) that constitute a given society so that their empirical existence may eventually be brought to coincide completely with the moral law. This project however, must depart from the given level of a people's moral, cultural and political development rather than from abstract morality. Popular religion thus marks a contextualized intervention into a given historical society aiming to transform it in order to attain the realization of reason therein.

81 *Ibid.* pp. 504–505.

82 Hegel indicates a linear conception of the religious, cultural and political development of a people's spirit, *ibid.* p. 500.

Conclusion

This chapter has extricated and analysed the young Hegel's engagement with Kant and his complementary development of the idea of popular religion in "The Tübingen Fragment". This incomplete manuscript reveals an original engagement with Kant's moral philosophy, which works through the contradiction of its dualistic structure and his ambition of overcoming it and realizing reason in the sensible world, a development which became the pivot of Hegel's transition from moral philosophy towards normative social theory. Hegel started out from a consistently Kantian position. He followed Kant in identifying the essential contents of religion with practical reason and proceeded to search for the prerequisite institution necessary for realizing it in the sensible world.

The gist of "The Tübingen Fragment" consists in Hegel's attempt to determine the optimal type and form of moral cultivation, which might attain the realization of reason in the world. He considered, criticized and ultimately rejected objective religion, that is, traditional institutionalized religion and theology. Instead he identified popular religion as the necessary instrument and institution that might accomplish the realization of reason in the sensible world. Of course, this was not an institution already in existence, but one that had to be created; thus Hegel spent the greater part of the manuscript developing and exploring his prescriptive outline of this institution of popular religion, concluding that it must be based on practical reason, appeal to the sensibility and sociability of the subjects constituting society and be integrated into all aspects of their lives, in order to gradually attain their moral, cultural and political development.

This project also reveals a number of significant philosophical developments, most notably, Hegel's confrontation with and transgression of the limitations of his Kantian point of departure. While Kant insisted that freedom consisted in the subject's spontaneous submission to the self-imposed moral law in complete abstraction from all empirical influences and impulses, Hegel's proposed attempt to complete Kant's project of realizing reason in the sensible world suggested that this could not be completed in abstraction from that world, but rather required an intervention therein.

Popular religion was the empirical means of intervening and rendering the moral law wholly subjective and thereby bringing about the coincidence of noumenal freedom and empirical existence. Popular religion thus functions as the mediation of this division, attained through the appeal to, and development of, the sensibility and sociability of the subject(s) in order to attain their moral development and, ultimately, freedom. However, it is a freedom rooted in unfreedom insofar as it relies on sensible and social means of moral cultivation, which run counter to Kant's definition of freedom. Hegel thereby simultaneously draws out and resolves the contradiction of Kant's moral philosophy, by letting popular religion mediate the unfreedom of empirical existence and noumenal freedom on the path towards their complete coincidence in subjective religion.

2 In Search of a Virtue: Hegel's Early Republicanism

I

The early period of Hegel's intellectual development (corresponding to his stay in Tübingen and Bern) is dominantly characterized by the critique of Christianity. The main reason for that critique is most succinctly given in a well-known letter from Hegel to Schelling from 1793: "Religion was hand in glove with politics. The former has taught what despotism has wished for, despise for humanity, that it is incapable for any good, incapable to be something by its own".¹ In Christianity and its alliance with the State Hegel sees one of the main causes of the spiritual and political backwardness of his time, especially when it comes to the situation in Germany. At the same time, Hegel never hesitates to name his religio-political ideal: *natural* religions of antiquity, especially the religion of the ancient Greeks. And the political order that represents the most suitable framework for those religions is the republican one.

The aim of this article, however, is not to prove that the political theory of the young Hegel is republican, although that will, hopefully, be shown as well. But what I mainly want to do is question the political and theoretical premises of Hegel's republicanism in order to identify the key problems that he wishes to solve with his republican ideal. Theoretical inquiry of this kind is based on the assumption that Hegel's early writings represent more than just a pre-stage of his later thought, that is, that the formation

1 J. Hoffmeister (ed.), *Briefe von und an Hegel* Vol. I (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1952), S. 24.

of his mature political philosophy does not presuppose simple abandonment of his early conceptions. Hegel's thought is from "the start oriented towards the 'system of reason'".² In other words, the essentially republican conception of the young Hegel is a result of an identification of a problem that will remain decisive for his political philosophy: how to conceive a state not only as a legal apparatus or an external power that guarantees the coexistence of freedom of one with the freedom of others, but as an ethico-political order that represents the actualization of the freedom of the individual in the intersubjective autonomy with others. In his early writings Hegel is trying to solve this problem in a way that does not really take into account the specific features of Modernity. A solution adequate to these features, that is, the one which implies proper understanding and acknowledgement of these features, he would not formulate earlier than in the late Jena writings, but in its entirety only in the *Philosophy of Right*.

"That Hegel, as well as Hölderlin and Schelling belonged to the partisans of Revolution is certain".³ It is also clear that Hegel "relates philosophy – and as a matter of fact philosophy actuated by Kant – and Revolution".⁴ In a letter to Schelling dated 16 April 1795 he writes about "reviving strength of ideas", admitting to his friend that from Kant's system he expects revolution in Germany. The revolution in question should strike "all present knowledge" in the first place, but Hegel leaves no doubt that as a consequence of it – that is, thanks to the fact that philosophers are proving human dignity – "the peoples will learn to feel it and not only demand their rights that were thrown in dust, but to take them back themselves, – to appropriate them to themselves".⁵ The question whether Hegel really wished for a political revolution in Germany, similar to the one that happened in France, can remain open. But it is beyond doubt that he strongly felt the need for a fundamental change of prevailing social and political

2 H. Kimmerle, "Zur Genesis des Hegelschen Systembegriffs", *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* Vol. 14 No. 3 (1972), S. 300.

3 O. Pöggeler, "Philosophie und Revolution beim jungen Hegel", in O. Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Freiburg and München: Alber, 1973), S. 25.

4 Pöggeler, "Philosophie und Revolution beim jungen Hegel", S. 18.

5 J. Hoffmeister, *Briefe*, SS. 23–24.

circumstances in Germany. Since the main source of German misery he attributes to Christianity, that is, to the fact that it is thoroughly immersed in public life and determines the life of the individual (mainly thanks to its official status as state religion), it is clear that the desired change has to have a spiritual substance or, more precisely, that it has to assume a spiritual renovation of the people.⁶ This is the main motive for Hegel's considerations about folk or public religion which "goes hand in hand with freedom".⁷ The effect of such a religion should be twofold: "strengthening the incentives of morality through the idea of god as a moral legislator"⁸ and at the same time "elevation, ennoblement of the spirit of a nation – that so often dormant feeling of its dignity awakens in its soul."⁹ However, Hegel does not want to exclude Christianity from the start as a candidate for a folk religion. He is akin to question the extent to which Christianity qualifies as a folk religion. Hegel's efforts to give an outline of a folk religion and his critique of Christianity in the Tübingen and early Bern fragments thus belong to the same problem nexus from the beginning.

The role of philosophy in respect of folk religion is to deliver the universal principles which Hegel relates to Kant's moral philosophy and which have to make the essential criteria for all of its content. "The teachings must necessarily be of such a character, even if their authority rests on God's Revelation, that they are authorised by a general human reason, that every man recognizes and feels their bindingness when his attention is drawn to it".¹⁰ For this reason these teachings have to be universal, abstract, simple

6 "Spiritual" is not understood as opposed to "social" or "political" here, but as interconnected with them, that is, as a moral and religious substance of the totality of communal life. "The spirit of a people, history, religion, degree of its political freedom cannot be considered separated, either by the influence of one to another or by their character – they are interwoven in one bond" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Frühe Schriften I*, ed. Friedhelm Nicolai and Gisela Schüler; *Gesammelte Werke I* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1989), S. 111).

7 *Ibid.* S. 110.

8 *Ibid.* S. 153.

9 *Ibid.* S. 86.

10 *Ibid.* S. 103. This is why Hegel, in the course of his evaluation of specific dogmas and doctrines of Christian religion, rejects the belief in Jesus as a historical person

and there should not be more than few of them. But this is precisely why a folk religion cannot be entirely based on the universal truths of reason. The second requirement of a folk religion is that it should appeal to the heart, fantasy, to the sensual side of human nature in general. "In the case of a folk religion it is especially of greatest importance that phantasy and heart do not remain unsatisfied, that the first is fulfilled with great, pure images and that in the second the benevolent feelings are awakened".¹¹ At last, the teachings of a folk religion have to be so constituted that "all needs of life, the public state activities affiliate to them".¹²

There are several important consequences of this conception of folk religion. The first one concerns Hegel's understanding of morality and his relation to Kant. Hegel's philosophical programme persists – reduced to a simple denominator – on the application of "Kant's 'practical reason' to different empirical objects".¹³ It is clear that the first requirement of a folk religion is grounded in Kant's practical philosophy. For Hegel, moral action is one that, generally speaking, conforms to the universal principles of reason. But at the same time, with the second requirement he aims to overcome the dualism which exists between reason and sensuality in Kant's ethical philosophy. By doing so he is aware that the action which has its source in "empirical character" or for which the incitement is sensual cannot strictly speaking be considered ethical.¹⁴ He nevertheless insists on the

(and with it all other purely historical ingredients of Christianity). That belief is not founded in a practical need of reason but is a belief that rests on the testimonies of others" (*Ibid.* S. 92). The "approach" to the teachings which are founded in the practical need of the reason – and that kind of foundation is the first demand of a folk religion – "is open to everyone who wants to hear its voice (one day it says it to someone else etc.). Historical belief is by contrast [by] its nature limited, its dissemination is dependent on accidental circumstances, it is a source out of which not everyone can create" (*Ibid.* S. 93).

11 *GW* I, S. 101.

12 *Ibid.* S. 103.

13 M. Bondeli, *Hegel in Bern* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990), S. 6.

14 For example, when he states that "in our own nature such sentiments are weaved, – that although not moral, not originating in the respect for the law and thus neither completely strong and safe nor having value in themselves, nevertheless deserve respect,

integration of empiricism or sensuality into morality because “if we speak about how it should be affected on men, we have to take them as they are and search for all of good drives and sentiments through which maybe his freedom will not be directly advanced but his nature can be ennobled”.¹⁵ In other words, Hegel is not interested in founding a new ethical philosophy. “Kant has posed that question and – Hegel seems to think – sufficiently grounded the moral action”.¹⁶ Hegel’s main concern is how to *realize* morality, both in the life of an individual and in the actions of a nation. The key role in that respect belongs to religion, “which has to take the task of the formation not only of the empirical character of an individual, but also of the spirit of a people, so that it can represent an appropriate sphere for the actualization of morality”.¹⁷

The role of a folk religion is thus to mediate between the individual and the nation on the one side, as well as between the strict demands of reason and the facts of sensuality or empiricism on the other. In the latter respect, the effect of religion is twofold: in the first place it is, so to speak, an instrument of reason, which eliminates or inhibits all of the sentiments and drives that are not compatible with the “universal principles of reason”. At the same time, since “we have to take men as they are”, religion finds the sensual incentives for morality. Generally speaking, it represents a “filter” to the totality of human sensuality that leads to a refinement or ennoblement of raw material of human nature. It is already a “gain if crude sensuality is only refined – and instead of actually animal drives, sentiments are awakened that are more capable for the influence of reason and that come closer to the moral, or where it is only actually possible that, if the loud yelling of sensuality is to some extent attenuated, also moral

they are yet amiable, they hinder vicious inclinations and promote the best in men” (*GW* 1, S. 101). Hegel also later speaks about a great “principle of self-sufficiency of the duty and the virtue” (*Ibid.* S. 141).

15 *GW* 1, S. 101.

16 M. Noro, *Das Problem der ethischen Autonomie und die “positive” Religion in den Jugendschriften Hegels* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1976), p. 33.

17 *Ibid.*

sentiments sprout”.¹⁸ Religion is a “dam” or a “hindrance” to the sentiments of a bad kind and at the same time, in its *positive* orientation it should create or detect and then promote the feelings and inclinations of the “good kind”, that is, those that, despite not being moral (*qua* feelings), are compatible with pure morality. Some of them are already inherent to human nature, such as compassion, benevolence and friendship. But the most important of the feelings of a “good kind” for Hegel is love. Although love has an “empirical character”, it has “something analogous to reason, insofar – as love finds itself in other people or in fact, forgetting itself – comes out of its existence, at the same time lives, feels and is active in others – just as reason, as a principle of universally valid laws, discerns itself in every reasonable being, as a fellow citizen of an intelligible world”. Love is “selfless, it does good not because it has calculated that joys which arise from its actions are purer and more long-lasting than those of sensuality or those which arise from the satisfaction of some passion – it is thus not the principle of refined self-love, by which I is always the last purpose”.¹⁹

In this way love seems to be not just “analogous” to reason, but also a unification of reason and sensuality that Hegel is searching for. Having its source in feeling, love is “a pathological principle of action”,²⁰ but it actualizes itself only in the intersubjective relation, in which an individual freely renounces himself for the other in order to attain himself and to recognize himself in the other. That is the element of universality in love. In this way “love overcomes selfish motives in the empirical and actualizes the ethical orientation of the will”.²¹ Moreover, the fact that this “ethical orientation of the will” comes about and actualizes itself only in the real experience of the relation to an other gives love a precedence to the demand of a practical reason that the action should conform to a universal rule.²² “Hegel aims

18 *GW* I, S. 100.

19 *GW* I, S. 101.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Noro, *Das Problem der ethischen Autonomie ...*, S. 43.

22 Dieter Henrich rightly emphasizes that “In contrast to Kant (...) Hegel adopted from the moral of reason not so much the ethics of law as the appeal to freedom and spontaneity of action. His intention was generally to enable the free development

in his reasoning at a comprehensive action that confirms itself in the community with others, that does not have as only guarantee of its freedom the circular self-referentiality of the will of the individual to itself and as an evidence of its veracity only the reference to the purity of its intention.”²³ Love is thus the central concept of Hegel’s considerations on folk religion and of his early political theory in general. It makes possible not only the conjunction of reason and sensuality, and in this way the wholeness of the human being, but also, what is inseparable from that, the externalization of essentially internal morality and its actualization in the social and political order of the community.

One other thing should be noted here. It has been stated that, in his attempt to reconcile reason and sensuality, Hegel is aware of the difference between them, that is, of the fact that sensual inclinations and motives, even if they are of the “good kind”, can never be considered genuinely moral. But notwithstanding that, he does not think that they stand in opposition to each other, or, that there is a tension between them. There is no problem for him in “applying” morality to empirical nature and in sensualizing morality.²⁴ Human nature is “only impregnated with the ideas of reason –

of the authentic human life and to deny the legal ground to all orders that exercise coercion over it”. In his intention to reconcile “consciousness of freedom” and “sentiments of the heart”, he was in agreement with Rousseau. “And he assumed the right to interpret the Kantian autonomy also as spontaneity of our sentiment as well as an urbane, joyful freedom of converse in a republican state” (D. Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971, S. 68).

23 G. Duso, “Freiheit, politisches Handeln und Repräsentation beim jungen Hegel”, in H. F. Fulda and R.-P. Horstmann (eds), *Rousseau, die Revolution und der junge Hegel* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), S. 246.

24 Exactly because his intention is not to develop new ethical principles, as already mentioned above, but to “apply” Kant’s practical philosophy to empirical character of the individual and the social praxis, there can be, in my opinion, no talk of Hegel’s critique of Kant in the Tübingen and Bern writings. The question is, of course, to what extent this operation of “application” changes the nature of that what is being “applied”. In fact, Hegel thinks that there is no trouble in reconciling reason with sensuality (in that the one can simply be supplemented with the other we can however find an “implicite” or “unconscious” critique of Kant) (Noro, *Das Problem der ethischen Autonomie ...*, S. 32).

Just as the salt permeates a meal but, if it is properly prepared, should not be visible in lumps and yet gives its taste to the whole meal, or as the light permeates all, fulfils, shows its influence in whole of the nature, but cannot be presented as a substance and yet it gives the objects their shape, refracts in each of them differently, generates the healthful air out of the plants, so invigorate the ideas of reason the entire fabric of his sentiments, so presents itself to him through their influence the action in a distinct light, they show themselves rarely in their essence, but their impact permeates nevertheless all as a fine matter and gives all inclinations and drives a distinct livery.”²⁵ Such is the case with love. It represents an harmonious, non-mediated unity of reason and sensuality. It is however important to stress that Hegel’s “programme of unity” never falls prey to mystical irrationalism, for it is founded on the primacy of reason.²⁶ In other words, reason is not being subjected to the heart nor does it disappear in the web of human nature but “weavens” itself in it and always remains the criterion of the selection between the “good” and the “bad” inclinations.

The second important consequence of Hegel’s conception of folk religion is a critique of the Christian religion, which comes out of his effort to question the adequacy of Christianity for folk religion.²⁷ In this respect it should be generally noted that, despite the mostly negative results of the critique, Christianity is not being simply and dismissed in its totality. It is “critically differentiated in detail, partially discarded, partially is being attempted to save it in a newly conceived form.”²⁸ It was already mentioned

25 *GW* I, S. 85.

26 Bondeli, *Hegel in Bern*, S. 98.

27 For differences between Hegel’s early writings and his mature political philosophy in understanding of Christianity and possibility of conceiving Protestantism as a *religion civile* in *Philosophy of Right*, see: T. Petersen, “Religion civile, Volksreligion und Protestantismus”, in H. F. Fulda and R.-P. Horstmann (eds), *Rousseau, die Revolution und der junge Hegel* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), SS. 160–175. For the comparison of early writings and *Philosophy of Right* with regard to relationship between religion and politics, that is, Church and State, see: J.-F. Kervégan, “Die ‘politische Theologie’ Hegels”, in A. P. Olivier and E. Weisser-Lohmann (eds), *Kunst-Religion-Politik* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2013), SS.179–192.

28 *Ibid.* S. 114.

that Hegel never denies the moral character of the essence of Christian religion, in so far as that essence is identified with the “spirit” and the true meaning of Jesus’s teaching. But for Hegel it is also unquestionable that important parts of Christianity, for reasons that will be considered soon and for some of which in Hegel’s opinion already Jesus bears responsibility, are opposed or at least external to morality. To the ingredients of that kind belong especially purely or primarily historical elements of Christianity and its mysterious theoretical doctrines.

One of the main traits of the fragments in which Hegel expounds his critique of Christianity and a novelty in comparison to the earlier fragments is stronger emphasis on the “universal principles of reason” in a religion. It is in these fragments that we find statements about “the self-sufficiency of duty and virtue” and the “preponderance of our metaphysics over our physics, of abstract ideas over the sensual,”²⁹ and statements that aim at a clearer distinction between reason and sensuality, and the supremacy of the former to the latter. Compared to reason, “feelings” and “phantasy” are pushed to the background. But they do not disappear altogether. Hegel’s aim is not to establish a pure religion of reason. The “principles of reason” have a critical role in relation to all that is purely “mystical” and “historical” in Christianity. The “*factor of phantasy is not deleted in religion*” but “the material should not conflict with reason and morality.”³⁰ In other words, “before reason and sensuality should permeate each other, reason has to be purified of the old dogmatics that is inimical to freedom.”³¹

When it comes to Jesus’s “message”, although Hegel admits its moral character, he finds in the way it was given already the seed of its deformation. Jesus “preached” his doctrine to the people and especially to his pupils who were only passive listeners. They did not accept his message as an incentive to free and independent moral action, but as a given and completed doctrine; they were his followers more than his pupils. For that, in Hegel’s eyes, Jesus himself is responsible, as well as for the fact that the

29 *GW* 1, SS. 141, 148.

30 H.-O. Rebstock, *Hegels Auffassung des Mythos in seinen Frühschriften* (Freiburg and München: Alber, 1971), S. 84.

31 Bondeli, *Hegel in Bern*, S. 137.

number of his pupils was limited to twelve. All of that made the moral substance of the teaching fade from the spotlight. The number became an outward sign of the allegiance of the pupils and of their isolation from everyday private and public activities. The accent was thus shifted from the morality of Jesus's teaching to the external signs and especially to his person already during his life.³² For Hegel, the exact opposite of Jesus is Socrates. He did not have a determinate number of pupils, "or rather he had none – he was only teacher and master in the same way as it is every man for all as an example of righteousness and through exquisite reason".³³ Socrates did not preach, he spoke with his pupils – who were rather his friends – in a way that he "developed out of the human soul the concepts that were there and that needed nothing else but a midwife".³⁴ This is why "there were indeed Socratics, but there was never a guild that could be distinguished as masons by hammer and trowel – Each of his pupils was a master for himself; lots of them founded schools of their own, several were great generals, statesmen, heroes of all kind – not by one and the same mold, each in his own field, not heroes in martyrism and suffering, but in action and in life".³⁵

So, already in the original form of Christianity the tendency was present towards what will later become the cornerstone of it: belief in Jesus Christ and gratitude to him for his suffering and his death that brought

32 Some of the externality is to be imputed less to Jesus and more to his pupils. "Christ says, the Kingdom of God does not manifest itself in external gesture; it seems so that his pupils his instruction: Go to the all sides of the world etc. and baptise – misunderstood insofar – as they took this baptism – an external sign, for universally indispensable, what is more harmful because distinction by external signs involves sectarianism, distance from others – as generally the distinction by the moral through some other additional distinction gets weakened – and at the same time loses its clearness. Christ says – who believes, that does not mean precisely who believes *in me* – however, whether this is implied or not, the apostles understood it in that way, and the shibboleth of their friends – of the citizens of their Kingdom of God was not: virtue, righteousness – but: Christ, baptism etc." (*GW* I, S. 118).

33 *GW* I, S. 118.

34 *Ibid.* S. 119.

35 *Ibid.*

redemption to humanity. That is what is “the most important, the center of our religion”³⁶ and the condition for eternal salvation. That belief, however, could be morally justified if it was understood as to be only instrumental to morality – even if that would mean that the path leading to morality is a detour – and in that case morality would actually represent a real condition for the highest good. But in Christianity “the belief by itself is the reason of God’s benevolence and this benevolence gives thus eternal salvation to those that believe in Christ”.³⁷ At the same time belief in Jesus as an historical person is inseparable from a proposition on which Christianity is grounded and that is “the proposition about the corruption not only of men, but of human nature”.³⁸ That proposition represents in Hegel’s view complete humiliation and degradation of man because it implies his fundamental incapability for morality. And since “morality cannot be made the supreme condition of salvation, because men are not capable of it and salvation cannot happen at all, it was substituted (replaced) by the merciful grace of God with other ingredient, of which men are still capable of – namely the belief in Christ”.³⁹

This brings us to the last question in this part of Hegel’s critique of Christianity and that is the question of the political potential of Christianity, that is, of its adequacy to the third requirement of a folk religion. It is by now already clear, especially bearing in mind this third requirement that Hegel’s problem with Christianity is not that it has public status *as a religion* or that it is the official state religion. To be sure, he principally accepts Kant’s general distinction of morality and legality and relates religion to morality: “the highest purpose of man is moral and among his facilities to promote it, one of the best is his facility to religion”.⁴⁰ But he nevertheless finds that, exactly because of the effect it has to morality, “religion can become the purpose of legislators and administrators of the state – and the natural need of men for it can be satisfied by them by means of special

36 *Ibid.* S. 151.

37 *Ibid.* S. 155.

38 *Ibid.* S. 156.

39 *Ibid.* SS. 156–157.

40 *Ibid.* S. 139.

institutions”.⁴¹ The question of the nature of the relation between State and religion shall be considered later. Here it should be stressed that the main target of Hegel’s critique in these fragments is not the public status of Christianity but its *private* character; put differently, if Christianity is problematic as a public religion, it is only because of the private character of its teaching. In this respect, Hegel is trying to show that even the commandments of Christ that were given in the “spirit of virtue” (such as community of goods or renouncement of violence) are directed primarily to the individual. They prove “how much in his lessons Christ bore in mind only the education and perfection of the individual and how little it can be expanded to society at large”.⁴² Christianity considers earthly life only as a “valley of tears” and wants “to prepare people to be citizens of Heaven, whose sight is always directed upwards”.⁴³ That is why Christians are strangers in this world, their whole life is “meditatio mortis”.⁴⁴ The root of all that is wrong in Christianity is thereby the assumption of corruption of human nature, which thus proves to be not only morally abhorrent but politically harmful as well. For what could a public religion gain from the belief that men are incapable of achieving any good with their own effort?

As opposed to Christianity and as a prototype of a folk religion, Hegel evokes Greek natural religions and generally an experience of a *beautiful* life in antiquity. By this Christianity is associated; or even it is seen as the source of fragmentation, partition and division that characterizes the modern world and is perceived to be “external” to the actual life of the individual and the people. This “externality” is reinforced by the fact that a predominantly “individual” and “private” moral has been made publicly effective and legally binding. On the other hand, Greek religion is related to the integrity and wholeness of the human being⁴⁵ and considered to express the “interiority”, or better, “imannence” of morality to the community. We have already seen this

41 *Ibid.* S. 154.

42 *Ibid.* SS. 121–122.

43 *Ibid.* S. 110.

44 *Ibid.* S. 136.

45 “It could be very interesting to compare to it the belief of the Greeks – Their belief – that the gods favour the good and the evil leave to the discretion of frightful

contrast in Hegel's comparison of Jesus and Socrates. Jesus "preached", he had a definite number of pupils who excluded themselves from everyday life and worshipped his person more than they understood the morality of his teaching. The consequence was that morality was outweighed by external religious elements (belief in person, baptism).⁴⁶ Socrates, on the other hand, did not have pupils but friends of indefinite number who did not isolate themselves from everything to follow him, but "stayed what they were", contributing to their community in different ways. He did not preach to them but only helped them become aware of morality and virtue that was already part of their being by his own example ("as every other man could") and through conversation. This way of proceeding Hegel relates with the fact that Socrates lived "in a republican state, where every citizen spoke freely with the other, and where a fine urbanity in converse was a share of almost the humblest populace".⁴⁷ Hegel gives special importance to self-reliance, self-experience and self-activity as qualities which folk religion should promote, as he finds Greek religion did. Even when he attributes practical value to Jesus's life and to Jesus as an historical person (in the first formulation),⁴⁸ he nevertheless makes it clear that "especially virtue has to be something self-experienced, something self-practised. The imitated, by heart learned virtue is something awkward, has something

Nemesis – was founded – build on the deep moral need of the reason, lovely animated by the warm breeze of sentiments" (*GW* I, S. 106).

46 This externality of Christianity is additionally enhanced by the fact that its tradition belongs to a foreign nation: "What is the historical knowledge of our people? It lacks distinctive, patriotic tradition – the memory, the phantasy is fulfilled with prehistory of a foreign nation – with the deeds and misdeeds of its kings, that do not concern ours" (*GW* I, S. 80).

47 *GW* I, S. 115.

48 In the second formulation he denies that the belief in Jesus as a historical person is demanded by the practical reason exactly because that belief depends on the testimony of others. Everything that is morally required an individual has to be able to apprehend and exercise as such on his own. Here Hegel stresses again the importance of self-thinking, self-judging, self-experiencing for morality in contrast to authority and history (*GW* I, S. 159). It should however be said that, although Hegel rejects Jesus as an "ideal" of virtue, he considers him an "example" of virtuous man (Rebstock, *Hegels Auffassung des Mythos ...*, S. 82).

that cannot persist against experience and ongoing acquaintance with the world, something that has no worth, no merit”.⁴⁹ When it comes to folk religion, it is compared to a “little house” in which we feel to be “at home” because we have built it ourselves.⁵⁰ A folk religion must be an integral part of a life of a nation, “it has to accompany it friendly everywhere – stand by its side in all of its affairs and severest matters of life as well as in its feasts and joys – but not in such a way that it imposes itself or as a tutor – but as a leader, as an adviser”.⁵¹ And in order not to lose its independence to a particular class, a nation should organize and conduct its religious activities by itself.⁵²

Finally, in these fragments we find the first outlines of Hegel’s historical understanding of religious phenomena, especially of Jesus’s way of teaching and of the emergence of Christianity in general. In respect of the former, the context of Jesus’s life is contrasted to that of Socrates. The Jews were in Hegel’s opinion already accustomed “by their forefathers and by their national poets to be harangued in a rough way, already in their synagogues were their ears used to moral preaching and to a direct tone of instruction”.⁵³ Jesus thus expounded his teaching in a way that was pertinent to the spirit of his time. Hegel does not yet say that Jesus did so deliberately in order to reach his audience and make it receptive to moral ideas. However, this way of explanation relieves Jesus of much responsibility for the way in which he taught. But the same is the case with Socrates. His unintrusive and “immanent” way of developing moral ideas and virtues was in great part a consequence of the republican spirit of the “State” he lived in and of its “fine urbanity”. For “how could even come into mind to someone like Socrates to preach in Greece”? For that he would “among Greeks become an object of ridicule”.⁵⁴ The spreading of Christianity was in Hegel’s view exactly the result of the decay of antique republican spirit. It was publicly

49 *GW* I, S. 149.

50 *Ibid.* S. 99.

51 *Ibid.* S. 110.

52 *Ibid.* S. 126.

53 *Ibid.* S. 115.

54 *Ibid.* SS. 118, 119.

accepted by the Romans at a time when public virtue and political greatness vanished and citizens turned to their private affairs.

II

In order to get a more comprehensive understanding of Hegel's early political theory and of his republicanism, it is necessary to take into consideration the remaining Bern fragments in which Hegel continues to expound his critique of the Christian religion. We shall concentrate on the essay on "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" and the two late fragments that are related to it. Although they belong to the same problem nexus as the earlier fragments, it is possible to detect some new accents and shifts in argumentation. Thus, in the aforesaid essay Hegel considers the reasons why Christianity became a "positive" religion, that is, a religion based on authority. In the course of that examination we can find a more thorough understanding of the relation between State on the one side and religion and morality on the other, but also new traits in that understanding in comparison to the earlier fragments. There is an important difference in the way Hegel is now criticizing Christianity as an official state religion. This has prompted some commentators to a view that Hegel develops a liberal concept of the State in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay.⁵⁵ Whether this is the case remains to be seen. But in order to attain a full insight into Hegel's concept of the State and in his overall political theory in his early writings, special attention must be given to his understanding of the relation between State and religion and to his more detailed account on the historical emergence of Christianity in the two later Berne fragments.

Hegel's main concern in the aforesaid essay, as already mentioned, is to question the reasons why Christianity transformed from an essentially moral teaching to a positive faith. "Positivity" is thus the central concept

55 R.-K. Hočevár, *Stände und Repräsentation beim jungen Hegel* (München: C. H. Beck, 1968), S. 79.

of Hegel's late Bern thought. It denotes every doctrine which has its source of validity and bindingness not in its content but in an external authority. In the case of moral doctrine, such as Christianity originally was, the fact that it becomes a positive doctrine is a special problem, or a contradiction. For it means that we should not live by it because it corresponds to the demands of practical reason, but because it rests on an authority external to it (tradition, miracles, will of God, state regulations). One of the features of the late Bern fragments is that Jesus is now much clearly presented as a teacher of pure morality. He himself lived at a time when the Jewish religion became positive and he "recalled to the memory of his nation the moral principles that lay in its sacred books (the highest principles of morality Jesus found, he did not establish new ones ...)"⁵⁶ He wanted to see the religion respected for the morality inherent to it at a time when it was obeyed only as will of God or juridical ordinance. This does not mean that Jesus's teaching did not already contain some positive elements (him giving much attention to his personality or the miracles).⁵⁷ But Hegel now makes clearer that this was a consequence of Jesus's conscious adjustment to historical circumstances. He had to meet the expectations of his

56 *GW* I, S. 283.

57 Nothing was more detrimental to the morality of Jesus's religion as the miracles through which he tried to draw attention to his teaching. Hegel strongly opposes the miracles not because understanding cannot prove them, as they have their source in the supranatural: that incapability of understanding can be compensated through phantasy, needs of which can be satisfied by miracles, and the "understanding lets this to happen" because this is not its field anymore and "nothing more is asked from it" (*GW* I, S. 378). The belief in miracles should be rejected because it deprives reason of its primacy and makes it not the "mistress" but the "maid" in the moral sphere (*Ibid.* S. 292), since miracles are manifestations of God to which reason must succumb. This holds for whole of the system of positive religion in which morality should be exercised only because it is commandment of God. In this way reason is not absolute and perfect and as such the source of moral legislation anymore, but only an instrument of positive religion or of the commandments of God, by which that God or the positive religion effect the sensuality. "In the system of a positive religion the reason is only allowed to make claims to the sensual world, which promises to satisfy that religion – claims to the will make the law of commander, the positive religion itself, which promises support here" (*Ibid.* S. 356).

people, or speak to them in the way that they understood, in order to make them receptive to pure morality again. Thus Jesus presented himself to his people as the son of God or Messiah, “but that what they expected from the Messiah he tried to direct more towards the moral”.⁵⁸

In Hegel’s view, “it was not Jesus himself who elevated his religious teaching into a specific sect distinguished by customs of its own, this was the result of the zeal of his friends and of the way in which they understood his teaching, of the form, of the claims with which they propagated it, of the arguments with which they sought to uphold it”.⁵⁹ They established from the start a positive sect “which treats commandments of virtue as positive commandments and then links other positive commandments with them” and which thus acquires traits that are “completely alien to a purely philosophical sect (i.e. a sect which also maintains religious teachings but recognizes no other judge than reason)”.⁶⁰ In the way Hegel criticizes Jesus’s pupils we find resonance of arguments made in earlier fragments. They “distinguished themselves neither as generals, nor as profound statesmen, on the contrary they found their honor not to be that”; “lacking a great store of strength of spirit of their own, their conviction about Jesus’s teaching was grounded above all on their friendship with him and their dependence on him”, “they had not attained truth and freedom by their own effort, but by laborious learning acquired dim sense of them and formulas about them”.⁶¹ This is why they disseminated Jesus’s teaching as a positive faith and gave more importance to external signs than to virtue. But it is precisely because the pupils formed a positive sect – because they were a small and isolated group of closely related friends who were dependant on the doctrine of their teacher – that some of their claims had to be abandoned after Christianity expanded and encompassed the whole society or most of it (community of goods, equality). And some characteristics that make sense among a small group of friends were distorted in such circumstances

58 *GW* I, S. 290.

59 *GW* I, S. 293.

60 *Ibid.* S. 298.

61 *Ibid.* S. 293.

(fraternity, unity, closeness, mutual support).⁶² This, for Hegel, is one of the main differences between a positive and a philosophical sect: "Joining a philosophical sect changes little or nothing in domestic, civil and other relations [...] on the other hand, anyone who attached himself to a small Christian sect, distanced himself in that way from many with whom he has been linked by kinship, office or service, his sympathy, beneficence became restricted to a determinate narrow circle".⁶³ As opposed to Jesus's pupils and as an example of a philosophical sect Hegel again mentions the friends of Socrates, emphasizing their independence, self-activity, dedication to family and homeland, which, for him, are all the result of their republican spirit.

Now, although most of the actions and characteristics of the original Christian sect deformed with the spreading of Christianity and although belonging to the Church became more important than the virtue itself, resignation or non-membership did not entail loss of civil rights, "as little as one would acquire civil rights or at least the possibility to qualify for civil rights with the admission".⁶⁴ This "injustice" occurred only when Church attained the scope of State, when it became ruling, or when State and Church became one. Hegel is now opposing this union between Church and State with contractual arguments and in a way that seems to imply strict separation of legality and morality. Thus "civil laws affect the security

62 An example is the Eucharist which in its original form, as a last celebration of the Passover between Jesus and his pupils, did not have any metaphysical or mysterious meaning, but was "a symbol in which he imaginatively conjoined the memory of him with the parts of the meal they would enjoy in the future" (*GW*I, S. 301). This act by which, after Jesus's death his pupils remember him as a friend and as a teacher, an act that thus "results voluntarily from the friendship", was by later Christians transformed into "religious duty" in "a mysterious act of worship which replaced Jewish and Roman sacrificial feasts". That what in the meal was symbolic expression of memory and friendship became something mystical, so that "friendly conversation, social intercourse, mutual opening and cheering of minds do not come in consideration in such a sublime enjoyment" (*Ibid.* S. 302). And this also was inevitable consequence of the fact that something that was meaningful in a small circle of friends became religious duty for a whole of society.

63 *GW*I, SS. 298–299.

64 *Ibid.* S. 313.

of persons and the property of every citizen, whereby his religious opinions are completely out of consideration; whatever his faith is, it is the duty of the state to protect his rights as a citizen and in relation to the state he can lose these rights only by infringing the rights of others ... So far as faith is concerned, he cannot bind himself to anything against the state, for the state is incapable of making or accepting conditions of that kind".⁶⁵ Hegel treats the freedom of religion as an "article of the civil contract",⁶⁶ as a "right in which a man must be protected not primarily as a member of a church, but as a citizen" and "which cannot be renounced by entry into any society whatsoever".⁶⁷ And even "if the religious ordinances of the state become laws, then once again the state attains no more than the legality which is all that any civil laws can produce".⁶⁸

Does this mean that Hegel, accepting Kant's separation of legality and morality, argues for separation of State and religion? In this case, in contrast to the fragments on folk religion, the problem with Christianity would not be its private content, but the fact that it as a *religion*, which addresses morality, is being promoted by the State. Thus, we would have a concept of the State in which political authority is indifferent to religious questions and concentrates only on securing external rights of an individual.

This however does not seem to be the case, although Hegel's concept of the State in the late Bern fragments is not unambiguous. But Hegel's main concern is not the State in the first place at all, but the Church, as an institution that could promote morality, which is its main and fundamental purpose. To put it differently, Hegel does not treat morality and religion simply as pure private affairs of the citizens. The majority of "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay is concerned with understanding the process in which religion became positive, the final stage of which was the union of State and Church. But as we have seen, the positivity was inherent in Christianity from the beginning, evolving gradually towards the form it attained as a state religion. It can be said that Hegel's ideal is religion or "church" that

65 *Ibid.* S. 317.

66 *Ibid.* S. 315.

67 *Ibid.* S. 335.

68 *Ibid.* S. 308.

would spontaneously arise from the consensus of society and in such “non-positive” form – or in a form that is at least as positive as possible – stand in harmony with civil laws. This is one of the main meanings of Hegel’s distinction of civil and ecclesiastical contract. In contrast to the former, in the latter there can never be majority rule, because that would mean that an individual allows others to decide *pro futuro* the content of his faith. It is absolutely against the nature of opinion that an individual subjects it, something his own, to a majority vote and that what is possible in a civil contract, namely that an individual subjects his will to a general will and regards the latter as his law, can in no way produce an ecclesiastical contract, that is, one about faith; such contract is inherently impossible, and if nonetheless is made, it is totally null and void.⁶⁹ The “general faith” is always result of unanimity and the ecclesiastical contract is in every moment only an expression of the correspondence in the faith of all individuals. That is why “in matters of faith there is in strictness no social contract”, and the “belief of the church must in the strictest sense be the general faith of this church, i.e. of all of the individuals”.⁷⁰ For the same reason Hegel rejects representation in matters of faith, which takes place in the Catholic Church. Here representatives of congregations and church officials, assembled in general councils, have supreme power to decide by majority rule on what the faith of the whole church is and thus also of every individual. To be more precise, the problem for Hegel lies in the fact that “the people has lost long ago the right they had for many centuries to choose their own representatives and officials”⁷¹ and these are now appointed by officials of the Church or by a body independent of the people. They are thus “representatives in name” and not “in fact”. The representation “in fact” presents no problem, but in that case the representatives “can be given no other authority except to state what the faith of congregation is” and to declare the conditions under which their congregation is prepared to unite with other congregations in a single church.⁷² In every case, it is decisive for a religion that the faith

69 *Ibid.* S. 328.

70 *Ibid.* S. 332.

71 *Ibid.* S. 328.

72 *Ibid.* S. 328.

of every individual must be his faith because he has voluntarily chosen it and not because it is the religion of his church.

One could even say that this kind of religion where faith of the one stands in harmony with the faith of others represents Hegel's ideal not only of Church, but of State as well. However, only in a sense that that harmony and the coincidence of the religion that proceeds from that harmony on the one side and the State and its laws on the other comes about from itself, that is, it is not imposed by the authority of any kind. This was the case in the ancient *polis* where citizens bore moral laws in themselves and actualized them in their political activity. The Greeks "neither taught nor learned, but practiced by their actions the moral maxims which they could call their own; in public and in private and domestic life, everyone was a free man, everyone lived by his own laws. The idea of his homeland, of his state, was the invisible, the higher, something which he worked for, something what impelled him to effort, it was final end of the world, or the final end of his world – an end that he found manifested in reality or which he himself co-operated in manifesting and maintaining".⁷³ The ancient *polis* is thus the historical example of Hegel's religious and political ideal. However, in the situation where moral laws are commandments of some external authority, as is the case with the Church of his own time, Hegel is stressing the importance of distinction between the "ecclesiastical" and the "civil" contract and making clear that the freedom of conscience is a fundamental article of the latter. The "liberal thought of the state is always present as a corrective" and "taken into account against the coercive character of the church-state".⁷⁴

Hegel thus does not ignore the problem of the State – as a modern legal and political order – nor the demand, also distinctively modern, for the separation of legality and morality. Or, to put it differently, he is aware that the restoration of the *polis* in its pure form is impossible. But even at this point he is not advocating strict separation in a "liberal" sense. The State cannot as a state, but "only as a moral entity demand morality from its citizens" and it establishes institutions in order to achieve that

⁷³ *GW*I, S. 368.

⁷⁴ Bondeli, *Hegel in Bern*, SS. 193–195.

aim. However, the State cannot do that directly – through the civil laws, for that would be “improper, contradictory and laughable” – but only “through trust and this it must first arouse. Religion is the best means of doing this, and all depends on the use the State makes of it whether religion is appropriate to correspond to this purpose; this purpose is plain in the religion of all peoples, all have this in common, that their efforts always bear on producing a certain disposition, which cannot be the object of civil legislation – and they are better or worse according as, with a view to producing this disposition which gives birth to action in correspondence with the civil or the moral laws, it sets to work through moral incentives or through terrorizing the imagination and, consequentially, the will”.⁷⁵ The separation of legality and morality is respected, but at the same time transcended in religion, which produces a “*complementum* of the laws”⁷⁶ in the moral disposition. “The legality of the state sphere is elevated into the moral through folk religion. If the incentive to moral determination of the will is understood not only as respect for the law but also as love for duty, the decisive condition is created for the realization of morality in private and in public space”.⁷⁷ It all depends on the political, that is, on the way the State “indirectly” uses religion; it can become support for despotism and repression (“terrorizing the imagination”), or promote emancipation and the self-activity of the people.⁷⁸

75 *GW*I, S. 308.

76 *Ibid.* S. 309.

77 Kimmerle, “Zur Genesis ...”, S. 305; see also B. Bourgeois, “Der junge Hegel und das Rousseausche Verhältnis von Moral und Politik”, in H. F. Fulda and R.-P. Horstmann (eds), *Rousseau, die Revolution und der junge Hegel* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), SS. 227, 231.

78 The programme of the folk religion retains its importance in the essay on positivity, although “folk religion” is not the central concept anymore. In the earlier fragments Hegel found that the assignment of the State was to make objective religion subjective. And he expressed his concerns with regard to the way in which State can fulfil this assignment, if the separation of legality and morality should be maintained, as well as the freedom of conscience. “... the institutions must be in accordance with the freedom of conviction, they must not coerce the conscience and freedom, but

For all of the Bern writings, it holds that in Hegel's view "the internal – moral – emancipation of the individual is the same as – republican – participation in political life". This idea "means never the mutual cancelation of morals and politics or their neutralization in a third concept, but consists in setting an identity that preserves the difference and that comes out of these exact differences in the concurrence of their interaction".⁷⁹ The "identity that preserves the difference" however is in Bern more of a programme than an actual point of interest and an object of Hegel's scrutiny. Although he does not simply neglect the problem of the modern State, as we have seen, Hegel nevertheless closely relates his moral and political ideas to antique ethico-political communities. Even if he does not simply wish for the restitution of the *polis*, it nevertheless represents a measure to which his own programme is tailored and an idea in approximation to which his own time gets merit. What exalts the life of Greek antiquity is the fact that morality was inherent to the political community and not something given from the outside that should be obeyed. And by the same token political reality was nothing but a manifestation of morality. Exactly the disappearance of that reality and the loss of "that feeling, of that consciousness which, under the name of virtue, Montesquieu makes the principle of the republics",⁸⁰ was fertile ground for the spreading of Christianity. Since the reason could not meet the practical and the absolute in reality and in man's will, it found them in the "deity, that were offered to it by Christian religion, beyond the sphere of our power, of our volition, but not of our supplications and prayers".⁸¹

The principles of practical reason the Greek citizen realized, in Hegel's view, in his political activity. Hegel's understanding of Greek antiquity and its republican spirit shows that he has in mind the unmediated unity of morality and politics in the *polis*; this unity was sustained by natural religion. He transposes demands of practical reason, which he himself sees as formulated by Kant and which he makes the basis of his own considerations,

have to effect the determining grounds of the will indirectly – how much can the state do? – how much must be ceded to every man?" (*GW*I, S. 139).

79 Bourgeois, "Der junge Hegel ...", SS. 233–234.

80 *Ibid.* S. 369.

81 *Ibid.* S. 371.

to the ancient Greek world. In other words, Hegel does not yet fully apprehend the tension between those demands and the idea of ethico-political harmony, of which the ancient *polis* is an historical example. He speaks highly of the fact that, when confronted by the idea of his homeland, the individuality of the Greek citizen vanished.⁸² The case is similar to Hegel's depiction of the emergence and expansion of Christianity. It is seen as a result of the loss of political freedom and public virtue and related to the "individualization" and "privatization" of life activities in the Roman Empire. "All activity, all ends now bore upon something individual (...) all political freedom vanished also; the citizen's right gave him only a right to the security of property that now filled his entire world."⁸³ Since he could not found his "immortality" in his republic, "death must have been something terrifying".⁸⁴ And in this situation of the actual historical corruption of people, "they were offered a religion which either was already adapted to the needs of the age (...) or else was one out of which men could form what their needs demanded and what they could then adhere to".⁸⁵ Individualism and private property are thus not apprehended as distinct modern phenomena, but understood as a cause of "decay" or of "corruption" of the ancient republican communities. At best, Hegel accepts them as a necessary evil and not as a higher principle in comparison to the ancient world.

Despite this "misapprehension" – judged from the standpoint of his later conception of the State – Hegel is in Bern developing a programme that will have a long-lasting relevance for his philosophy. Proceeding from Kant's practical philosophy, that programme aims at overcoming the dualism between reason and the "empirical" character of the individual and at the same time, what is inseparable from that, conceiving the State not only as a legal entity that secures the "external" rights of the individual, but also as an ethical totality which represents the actualization of freedom. Although Hegel does not yet recognize the tension between the opposites he is trying

82 *Ibid.* S. 368.

83 *GW* I, SS. 369–370.

84 *Ibid.* S. 370.

85 *Ibid.* S. 371.

to reconcile, but harmonizes them in an unmediated unity, we should have at least three things in mind when evaluating his programme. Firstly, to be sure Hegel's ideal is the ancient *polis*, for it represents a perfect example of the immanence of morality in politics. But Hegel does not want the rehabilitation of the polis in its pure form in his own time. He recognizes the distinction of legality and morality as one of the fundamental traits of modernity. And he is aware that those spheres have to be reconciled in a "higher unity" which will not simply nullify the difference between them. However, in the Bern writings he is not yet developing that kind of unity, but avoiding the problem through the conception of folk religion. Secondly, Hegel's programme of reconciliation never falls, as mentioned earlier, to romanticism or irrationalism. The fundament of that programme are the "universal principles of reason". It is them that are "applied" to the empirical character and that make up the criteria of differentiation between "good" and "bad" feelings and inclinations. Similarly, Hegel is not advocating morality that would be a function of a particular culture or of a specific "character" of a nation. He is striving for rational morality, one that is the outcome of following the universal laws of reason. Although in this respect it is also *in the last instance* assumed the harmony of morality and politics, it is the immanence of *this* kind of morality that Hegel is searching for. At last, and perhaps most important, in Hegel's Bern political theory we can find the seed of his later distinctive understanding of freedom. Here it is elaborated in his consideration of love, as a relation in which the individual "forgets" himself for the other in order to "attain" himself in the other. Already in love it is thus clear that the individual realizes himself only in the intersubjective relation. To put it differently, love does not only reconcile reason and sensuality, but also represents the first form of "identity in difference" of the individuals in which freedom is born and in which it affirms itself. This understanding, with which, as shown, Hegel avoids self-referentiality of the will in determining freedom, will be more thoroughly developed in the later stages of Hegel's development and will become the basis of his mature political philosophy.

3 On the Violence of Positivity in Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*

“Think! Abstractly! *Sauve qui peut!*” Thus begins Hegel’s short piece titled “Who thinks Abstractly?,” thought to be written in Bamberg in 1807, hardly a year after the publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this rather enigmatic text, Hegel seems to assemble a position he had begun to articulate in his Frankfurt writings. Abstract thinking, Hegel contends, is not a theme that should exclusively interest philosophy, and much less is it merely a “metaphysical” question. The question about the “abstract” should not remain irrelevant to those who, more interested in the world of human affairs – the historical, the cultural, human actions and institutions – flee from “abstract thought” like a person, as Hegel writes, “attacked by the plague”.¹ Abstract thinking not only permeates the practical world in profound and almost imperceptible ways. It can also produce corrosive effects precisely in the realm of the practical, insofar as it remains unthought (and the abstract is precisely what remains unthought in every single particular reality). So, yes, indeed: confronted with abstract thinking, save yourself if you can!

But, what exactly is this “abstract” that demands our urgent attention? And, moreover, how is it that the abstract, insofar as it is a mode of thought, can come to express itself in concrete singular realities? Hegel, as we know, does not only claim an intimate relation between forms of thought and the historical world. Thought *is* history and *produces* history. Abstract thought is not only an *historical* comportment particularly characteristic of Modernity. In its tendency to preserve, and take to the limit, the separation that is produced by reflection, it also represents for Hegel

1 G. W. F. Hegel, “Who thinks Abstractly?,” in Walter Kaufmann (ed.), *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), p. 113.

a very specific mode of theory. One that, when actualized, can produce a very specific kind of violence against reality. Moreover, as I intend to show, abstract thinking represents for Hegel the threat of a radical violence – a form of violence that transforms itself merely into its own end; thus, a kind of violence that turns against itself, reproducing in its operation an uninterrupted and ultimately lethal circle.

This threat of radical violence does not mean we should leave abstract thinking unthought. It is rather an invitation, on the part of Hegel, to think it more urgently than ever, because if the abstract is not deeply reflected upon and comprehended, it can carry with it devastating consequences for the present. This relation between abstraction and violence, however, is not at all transparent in Hegel's writings. Nor is the notion of violence ("*Gewalt*") itself, which in German occupies an especially ambiguous place denoting both legitimate and abusive exercises of power. In what follows, I would like to propose at least one possible way to elucidate this complex relation in Hegel's thought. I want to do so by paying detailed attention to what he refers to as "positivity" in his early writings. "Positivity" is the term Hegel uses in his early theological writings to conceptualize the illegitimate attempts to move immediately from abstraction to concrete content, and from concrete content to action. Every time abstract thought attempts to give itself, illegitimately and immediately, a content it does not have, it ends up producing a very destructive kind of violence over and against the reality it has attempted to positively affix. My contention is that, in his development of the notion of the positivity of religion in his Tübingen, Bern and Frankfurt periods, Hegel produces powerful philosophical tools for understanding the *two* very particular kinds of violence that result from the immediate (positive) translation of abstract forms of thought into concrete historical realities. After showing how these kinds of violence are initially formally delineated in Hegel's analysis of the concept of positivity (in the first section of this chapter), I then turn, in the second part of this chapter, to the ways in which they gain a much more concrete ethico-political meaning in Hegel's Frankfurt fragments, particularly in those edited and gathered by Nohl under the title of "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate."²

2 There is a new critical edition of these fragments edited by Walter Jaeschke and recently published by Meiner Verlag. In the process of writing this chapter I did not

Only in understanding “positivity”, I argue, can we truly understand what it means for abstraction to be “violent”. And only by following the dual face this violence takes on, can we truly understand why in 1807 Hegel is still insisting with such urgency on the need to run away from abstraction, and to produce the forms of critique that will allow us to interrupt the kinds of violence that result from its various historical manifestations.³

From Abstraction to Positivity: The Genesis of the Relation between Abstraction and Violence in Hegel's Thought

To begin to understand the step that goes from abstraction to action, and from action to violence, we need to first consider Hegel's earlier development of the concept of positivity. This concept is a key theme in Hegel's early writings: it appears in his reflections from Tübingen (1793) and Bern (1794–1797) in connection with the idea of “positive religion”, and continues to be delineated in Frankfurt (1797–1800) around his reflections on the relations between religion, history and reason. I would like to carefully go over the development of this concept in Hegel's Tübingen, Bern and Frankfurt periods, because the transformations that this notion of positivity will undergo in these years can illuminate the central role abstraction will begin to play in Hegel's thought.⁴

have access to Jaeschke's edition. I will refer to the classic version of the fragments published by Suhrkamp and, when available, to the translation in English offered by T. M. Knox.

- 3 I would like to thank Don T. Deere for the translation of a first version of this chapter from Spanish and my very dear friend Colin McQuillan at St Mary's University for all his attentive comments, questions and suggestions to a final draft of this chapter.
- 4 Jamila Mascát's analysis in *Hegel a Jena. La Critica dell' Astrazione* (Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia Editore, 2011) has been especially important for this first part of my text. In the second part of her book Mascát rigorously follows the developments of the concept of positivity in the early writings. See also Hyppolite's classic analysis, *Introduction à la Philosophie de l'Histoire de Hegel* (Paris: Seuil, 1983). Hyppolite's attention to the concept of positivity will turn out to be essential also for later developments of this

The concept of “positivity” makes its appearance for the first time in Hegel’s oeuvre in “The Tübingen Fragment”. Hegel mentions it in connection to the division between “natural right” and “positive right”. “*Jus positivum*” or “arbitrary right” (“*willkürliches Recht*”) is the right instituted by the sovereignty of the State. Hegel refers in this way also to jurisprudence as a science of positive laws or “*willkürliche Gesetze*”, that is, “arbitrary” laws or laws established arbitrarily.⁵ Right from the beginning, the notion of positivity appears related to three elements that will be key in later developments of the concept: the idea of *authority*, on the one hand, and the connection between *arbitrariness* and *historicity*, on the other hand. Positive right is, according to Hegel, that which is instituted by the authority of the State, namely, an historically instituted authority. All this is in opposition to the idea (defended by proponents of *jusnaturalism*) of a necessary and universal natural law prior to all institutions and knowable through non-positive and non-historical rational principles.

This is the same meaning of the notion of positivity in Hegel’s first reflections on religion. Already in Tübingen, Hegel adopts the difference – well known at the time and recovered by Kant in his treatise *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1794) – between natural religion – whose morality is grounded on a pure-practical concept of reason – and revealed or *positive* religion – whose moral precepts derive from the external authority of divine command.⁶ Through this adoption from Kant’s practical philosophy, positivity progressively begins to attain for Hegel a more critical

concept in Foucault’s thought, particularly in his notion of “*dispositif*”. I will not be able to develop this side of the question in this chapter, but I do mention it since I think it shows the relevance of Hegel’s earlier political and philosophical reflections for our contemporary approaches to the question of violence and the possibility of its philosophical critique.

5 G. W. F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* Vol. 3 (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1968), S. 121 (Excerpt 14).

6 The distinction between natural and positive religion is not exclusively related to Kant. Hegel seems to be following Kant in this point, but it is clear that Kant might be following a distinction that had become common at the time, very present in Germany in the discussions between Wolffians and Pietists, and developed already also by Mendelssohn. I thank Colin McQuillan for bringing this point to my attention.

and negative meaning, inasmuch as it relates to the idea of *heteronomy*, that is, to an external command conceived in contrast to the idea of moral *autonomy*. While in Tübingen, following Kant, positivity is not considered to be mutually exclusive with the development of morality (positive religion can even be in accord with morality), in his Bern writings on "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" (1795–1796) Hegel radicalizes his critique of positivity. He describes it as that which not only opposes, but can also become an impediment for the exercise of moral autonomy. The problem of positive religion, Hegel writes, is that it does not recognize the

(...) native capacity or receptivity for virtue and the character of freedom. (...) this character, the source of morality, has been wholly renounced by the man who has subjected himself to the law only when compelled by fear of his Lord's punishment. (...) The law whose yoke he bore was not given by himself, by his reason, since he could not regard his reason as free, as a master, but only as a servant.⁷

Hegel thus affirms a radical incompatibility between positivity and rationality. In this same line, the elements of authority and legality begin to be described exclusively in terms of imposition, submission, oppression and servitude.⁸

7 G. W. F. Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", in *On Christianity. Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (New York: Harper, 1961), pp. 79–80. See in German, G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke I, Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), SS. 117–118.

8 This is a servitude that Christianity, according to Hegel, has historically inherited from the positivity of Judaism and that, even more gravely for him, it has even transferred to the realm of feelings: while Judaism enforces a government only over actions, the positivity of the Christian religion, particularly represented in the institution of the Church, "still adds a command, contradictory with itself, of decreeing feelings" (cf. Hegel, *Werke I*, S. 184–185. The translation is mine. The original German says: "dass auch in der christlichen Kirche noch der widersprechende Zusatz, Empfindungen zu gebieten (...) da in dem Judentum doch nur Handlungen geboten waren"). Hegel points out that this brings about the risk of "self-deceiving" character, a state of consciousness that appears in Hegel's writings in Bern as anticipating the later criticisms of a "beautiful soul". As it will be shown later, all of this holds a close connection to the violence characteristic of the positivity entailed in a judgement.

In Bern, positivity is thus mainly related to the notion of “legalism” against which Hegel still defends the autonomy of Kantian morality. This view undergoes a significant transformation in Hegel’s Frankfurt writings from the moment he begins to discover the source of a discomfort with Kantian notions of autonomy and morality. This moment is key for the trajectory I am tracing since, in order to extend his critiques of positivity to the realm of Kant’s practical philosophy, Hegel will have to carry out an important transformation of this concept. The key to this transformation will be precisely the introduction of the idea of *abstraction* in his definition (and critique) of positivity.

In the fragments on “Religion and Love” (1797–1798), Hegel’s critique of positivity, inasmuch as it means authority and heteronomy, begins to signal the presence of an additional element than that of arbitrariness. Hegel focuses his attention on the contradiction lying behind every law or universal command, between the *emptiness* of the law’s form and the practical aims commanded by its content. This contradiction does not only apply to the moral concept (described now by Hegel as “positive” too). The moral law is even regarded as a paradigmatic example of this kind of positivity. Despite the empty form of the moral concept, despite the passivity with which it presents itself to reflection – that is, like a “concept without activity”, “a positive concept” – “it claims nevertheless, at the same time, to become practical. Such a positive concept is something merely known, something merely given, objective.”⁹ In this way, the positive concept only receives “its power, its force, its effectiveness from an object [in contradistinction to subjectivity] that demands respect or awakens fear”.¹⁰

Although, Hegel admits, the moral concept could in principle free itself from this positive form in so far as it is the activity of the subject itself

9 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe”, in *Frühe Schriften*, S. 240. The translation is mine. The original German is as follows: “Ein moralischer Begriff, [...] [ist], ein Begriff ohne die Tätigkeit, ist ein positiver Begriff; doch soll er zugleich praktisch werden; er ist nur etwas Erkanntes, ein Gegebenes, etwas Objektives.”

10 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe”, S. 240. The translation is mine. The original German reads: “[...] und erhält seine Macht, seine Kraft, seine Wirksamkeit nur durch ein Achtung oder Furcht erweckendes Objekt.”

that gives it its force (different from, for example, a command or external or objective laws), it seems that there is here always a *remainder of positivity*. This is precisely the contradictory nature of the empty form of the moral imperative, since it needs to be understood as absolutely separate from its content. This is how the abstract – literally, the *abstractum*, “thought as something separated”¹¹ – makes its appearance in Hegel’s thought in direct connection with positivity.

Positivity is defined from then on around the contradictory character of a command or a practical law, be it legal or moral. To give itself legitimacy, the legal or moral command needs to empty itself of any given content. In doing so, it paradoxically loses its practical capacity – its force, its power. This abstract, separate, character defines the very activity of positivity – or, we could say, *it defines positivity as the activity or effective action of said abstraction*. The two faces of this activity are initially described by Hegel in terms of (i) an *emptying* or transcendence of all the real on the part of the “*ideal activity*”, on the one hand, and (ii) the “*exigency*”, on the other, “that the *objective activity* should be equivalent [gleich sein soll] with the *infinite activity*”.¹² On the one hand, ideal activity (or activity of the ideal, of the abstract universal); on the other, objective activity, which in its exercise, nevertheless, demands to be infinite, universal. Here the two sides of positivity, which I will develop in more detail in the second part of this chapter (as disappearance, on the one hand, and terror, on the other), begin to be clearly delineated. These will turn out to also be, as we are about to see, the two concrete manifestations of the *violence* of abstraction.

We have not yet shown, however, the step towards this violence. In order to do so, we must first ask where the relation between abstraction and positivity is exactly located. Abstraction is defined in these fragments as a radical separation between the real and the possible, between the form and the content of the law or the command that seeks, contradictorily, to be at once practical and universal. Once this separation is taken to its extremes, Hegel continues, it is not possible to escape it except by means of a *violent* operation. This operation takes place by immediately

11 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe”, S. 252. The translation is mine.

12 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe”, S. 241. The translation is mine.

and arbitrarily producing a unity, either by imposing the possible on the real, on the one hand, or by imposing the real on the possible, on the other. These are, respectively, the two *faces of positivity* described above, and these, Hegel remarks, “cannot be realized save through violence”.¹³ This violent exercise itself is precisely what defines positivity: “There where the union of the non-unifiable is completed, there is positivity.”¹⁴

(i) *Ideal Activity and the Violence of Exclusion* – Thus we have, on the one hand, what Hegel has described as the *ideal activity*, which results from the abstracting of the whole of reality on the part of an empty universality. We have also here the radical lack of power (*impotentiality*) that results from this emptying operation. Hegel finds examples of this activity in Kantian practical philosophy, which he equates in these fragments with the abstraction proper to the legalistic character of positive religion.¹⁵ At the end of his fragment on “Religion and Love”, Hegel notes:

Kant. Philosophy – positive religion. (Divinity inasmuch as a sacred will [...] the unification is carried out in representation, what is unified are representations – representation is thought, but thought is not something existent).¹⁶

Kantian practical reason, “sharply opposes its determining power to what is determined in general”.¹⁷ As it is the case also with positive religion,

13 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe”, S. 243. The translation is mine.

14 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe”, S. 244. The translation is mine. The original German reads, “... wenn Unvereinbares vereinigt wird, da ist Positivität”.

15 Hegel’s critique of Kant will become more nuanced and will gain its own specific form, different from other modes of positivity, throughout the Jena writings. In Frankfurt, in particular in the fragments on “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, the criticism of Kant is still tied to – it shows itself as interlaced with, as confused with – the criticism of the legalism of Jewish religion. Already in Jena, especially in *Faith and Knowledge* and in the essay on “Natural Law”, Hegel will formulate the critique of Kantian practical philosophy’s formalism much more carefully.

16 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe”, S. 254. The translation is mine. The original German reads “Kant. Philosophie – positive Religion. (Gottheit heiliger Wille, Mensch absolute Negation; in der Vorstellung ist vereinigt, Vorstellungen sind vereinigt – Vorstellung ist ein Gedanke, aber das Gedachte ist kein Seiendes-)”.

17 Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 304.

"it is intended that the determinant will be determined inasmuch as it is also the determinant".¹⁸ As much in Kant's practical philosophy as in positive religion, what can only be absolutely passive insofar as it is abstract (insofar as it is completely stripped of all activity) is immediately translated into activity. But the aforesaid activity is, consequently, only *ideal activity*. The unification between the possible and the real seeks to be accomplished immediately, thereby sacrificing all of the real in virtue of the merely possible.

Ideal activity thus results in a *positive unification* that Hegel relates once again to the element of authority and to subjugation to an external law. Nonetheless, as we know by now, this activity explicitly carries violence with it. What kind of violence it is exactly is something we have yet to analyse, but Hegel gives us several clues in this direction. "The faculty of the universal", he writes, is also, by virtue of the abstraction that characterizes it,

(...) the *faculty of exclusion* (...) This excluded element is subjected by fear; it constitutes a disorganizing of something, the excluded, that is not yet unified. That which is excluded is not something sublated [Aufgehobenes], but rather something separated that is preserved as such [as separated].¹⁹

Exclusion appears then in these earlier Frankfurt fragments as one of the sides of the violence of abstraction. It is quite a complex operation: *the excluded is that which can only be integrated insofar as it is separated, included only by means of the active exercise of its permanent negation*. Exclusion is the operation proper to the abstraction of the universal. It is, on the one hand, what the empty universal must carry to completion for its own legitimation (it must empty itself of content, exclude from itself everything that is not merely form, in order to legitimately reclaim itself as universal). It is also, on the

18 Hegel, "Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe", S. 254. The translation is mine. The German reads: "in jeder bestimmten Tätigkeit hat nicht das Tätige bestimmt, sondern ist als ein insofern Tätiges ein bestimmt Tätiges."

19 Hegel, "Grundkonzept zum Geist des Christentums", in *Früher Schriften*, S. 301. The German reads: "Kants praktische Vernunft ist das Vermögen der Allgemeinheit, d. h. das Vermögen auszuschließen; (...) dies Ausgeschlossene in Furcht unterjocht – eine Desorganisation, das Ausschließen eines noch Vereinigten; das Ausgeschlossene ist nicht ein Aufgehobenes, sondern ein Getrenntes noch Bestehendes."

other hand, that which, if ever made visible (if ever revealed and recognized as such, as exclusion), can entirely put into question this very same legitimacy. The excluded must be negated, thus, in its essence; it must remain hidden in the process by means of which the universal gives ground to itself.²⁰

(ii) *Objective Activity and the Violence of Authority* – There remains still, on the other hand, the second aspect or face of positivity: the demand that *objective activity* be successively and immediately infinite, universal activity. Even though the relation between this second aspect of the activity of abstraction and the first one (ideal activity) does not remain at all clear in his Frankfurt fragments, Hegel has begun to glimpse something here that will only become clear in his later Jena period. Namely, that the kind of operation an empty universality needs in order to preserve its form at the expense of its content brings with it a necessary contrary effect: the immediate elevation of contingent content to the form of necessity and universality. Facing the emptying of universality, whose result is nothing more than a false totality – in that it is lacking concrete content –, *objective activity* substitutes the whole for one of its parts, and claims for the contingent the place of universality. “Thus a positive faith”, Hegel explains, “is a union of the sort that in the place of the one and only possible union sets up another one; in the place of the one and only possible being it puts another being.”²¹ This is the operation through which the postulation (or “positive positing”) of the “Ideal” takes place.²² It is a false or incomplete unification, whose contingency remains hidden in the very process of

20 Cf. also the dialectic of force and the law of understanding in G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard (available online), p. 150. Hegel speaks in this context not only of force, but moreover of the “law of force”; namely, a law that renounces its force in exchange for the universality of its form.

21 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe [Glauben und Sein]”, S. 252. The translation is mine. The German reads: “ein positiver Glaube nun ist ein solcher, der statt der einzig möglichen Vereinigung eine andere aufstellt, an die Stelle des einzig möglichen Seins ein anderes Sein setzt.” See also an English version of some of these fragments in G. W. F. Hegel, “The Frankfurt Sketch on Faith and Being”, *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. Jon Stewart (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), p. 135.

22 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe [Liebe und Religion]”, S. 244.

positing itself as universal, namely, of positing itself as a “duty” or, more exactly, as the only possible *content* for this duty:

The contradiction results here from a substitution, for which imperfect modes of unification – which in other respects remain contradictory – are taken as perfect, and hence, as those that must [*soll*] be actualized. An imperfect being is thus substituted for a perfect one.²³

On the violence of this second aspect of positivity, there are not many clues to be found in these first fragments from Frankfurt. It is a matter, in any case, of violence, or “violent measures”, Hegel writes,²⁴ put in place by the abstract movement of *authority*. Hegel describes authority in this context as “a contingency from which necessity is born”, a “consciousness of the eternal” that governs “every form of feeling, thinking, and acting” and at the bottom of which is found “the ephemeral” as the only ground.²⁵ For Hegel, this kind of arbitrary authority will be set in relation to the risk of “the most extreme kind of tyranny”. A tyranny that results from an attitude of domination or absolute *sovereignty* over the world, and that puts the world *at the service* of an individual will. A will, in turn, conceived as legitimate under the protection of an Ideal that has been postulated (positively posited) as infinite and universal.

- 23 Hegel, “Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe [Glauben und Sein]”, S. 253. See also G. W. F. Hegel, “The Frankfurt Sketch on Faith and Being”, pp. 135–136. I have significantly modified the translation. In German the text reads: “[Dieser Widerspruch entsteht aus einer Täuschung,] indem unvollständigere Arten von Vereinigungen, die in anderer Rücksicht noch entgegengesetzt sind, ein unvollkommenes Sein für das in der Rücksicht, in der vereinigt werden soll, vollkommene Sein [genommen werden], und eine Art des Seins wird mit einer anderen Art verwechselt.”
- 24 G. W. F. Hegel, “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion. Neufassung des Anfangs”, in *Werke I, Frühe Schriften*, S. 219.
- 25 Hegel, “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion. Neufassung des Anfangs”, S. 223. The translation is mine, in German the text reads: “Die Zufälligkeit, aus welcher eine Notwendigkeit hervorgehen sollte, das Vergängliche, worauf sich in den Menschen das Bewußtsein eines Ewigen, das Verhältnis zu ihm in Empfinden, Denken und Handeln gründen sollte, dies Vergängliche heißt im Allgemeinen Autorität.”

The responsibility of philosophy is to unravel the mechanisms that lead to the exercise of this tyranny, as well as to the violence of *exclusion* resulting from the empty movement of universality. These are the two sides of an exceedingly complex mechanism of violence. Each one operates from the legitimacy given to it by an idea of universality produced by the abstracting capacities of reason. Positivity, as we have seen, is not abstraction as such,²⁶ but rather the complex movement by means of which abstraction tends to affix itself as content. Moreover, positivity is the process by way of which abstraction not only negates itself, but also erases the tracks of its negation, erasing therefore the kinds of violence that make it possible and sustain it.

Thus far, we have moved from positivity as arbitrariness (as the historical in contrast to the natural, as heteronomy in opposition to autonomy) to the introduction of abstraction and its very complex operations. This relationship between abstraction and positivity seems to be the key towards an understanding of the kind of violence that Hegel relates with abstract forms of thought. As Hegel expresses in the prologue to “The Positivity of Christian Religion” (written in 1800), positivity is not to be found in the content (be it empty or contingent, universal or historical), but rather in the *mode* in which that content is put to the test.²⁷ Positivity is as much a form of reason that completely abstracts from the historical world, as well as any contingent, historical element that, in elevating itself to universality, immediately demands its necessity and legitimacy. What I would like to explore in what follows is how all this is translated to the historical world, and so, how it becomes the substitution of the power of reason by the violence of its capacity for total abstraction.

26 The problem is not the operation of abstraction, but its fixation, the movement through which, as a moment, it seeks to establish itself as the totality of the process.

27 Hegel, “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion. Neufassung des Anfangs”, p. 223.

The Two Faces of Positivity: Disappearance and Terror in "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate"

Up to this point, I have traced the development of Hegel's notion of positivity, from his first texts in Tübingen, passing through Berne, up through his first notes on religion and love in his Frankfurt period. I have intentionally left out so far the fragments collected by Nohl under the title "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate", to which Hegel devotes the last two years of his stay in Frankfurt. In these fragments, the notion of positivity is centrally related to what Hegel presents as the *legalism* of the spirit of Judaism. That is to say, according to Hegel, a spirit for which all human relations are *exclusively* mediated by the presence of an absolutely objective and sovereign external law, whose dominion over the world is imposed in terms of servitude.²⁸ The critiques of positivity still appear throughout the text related to Kantian practical philosophy. Even though the notion of positivity that Hegel relates to Jewish law preserves all the nuances that we have analysed up to this point in Hegel's critique of positivity, it is mostly to the Spirit of Judaism, and not to Kantian formalism, however, that Hegel directs his main criticisms.²⁹

28 I will leave to the side the profoundly problematic aspect of what one could also describe as the violent "character" of Hegel's reading of Judaism in these fragments, and of the possible anti-Semitism present in Hegel's thought. This has been discussed in detail by others and with particular reference to "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" by Cohen (cf. J. Cohen, *Le Spectre juif de Hegel* [Paris: Galilée, 2005]). See also J. L. Nancy's prologue to Cohen's book, and A. Ormiston, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate: Towards a Reconsideration of the Role of Love in Hegel", *Canadian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 35 No. 3 (2002), pp. 499–525.

29 This is due in part to the fact that Hegel is already aware at this point of the deficiencies in his critique of Kant, and of the important differences that separate Kantian formalism from the kind of positivity he attributes to Judaic law. It is nevertheless curious that, in spite of this difference, the secondary literature on these fragments has concentrated above all on Hegel's critiques of Kant. As I have tried to show in other places, I think this is because less time has been lent to the complex argument Hegel is constructing around the phenomenon of legalism as related to Modern

In his critiques of the positivity of the Jewish religion, Hegel is concerned with the historical and conceptual antecedents of an ethico-political thought that he sees clearly reflected, in his time, in the conceptions of the modern State and the ideas of right and political life that derive from its constitution. In his analysis of the “spirit of Judaism” we see how Hegel is interested in comprehending the type of relations in the world of human actions that result from a *positive conception* of right. These relations, as we are about to see, reproduce and are mediated by very particular kinds of *violence* that, in Hegel’s judgement, are found at the very *foundation* of the law and not only in the (secondary) effects of its application.

I would like to briefly go over some key moments of this argument against the *violence of legalism*, as Hegel develops it in “The Spirit of Christianity at Its Fate”. I propose to read them in parallel to the movement of absolute freedom and terror described in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (that is, in Hegel’s philosophical and phenomenological reading of the historical experience of the French Revolution), where the kinds of violence conscience experiences are described precisely as the two different sides of the form action takes when resulting from extreme modes of abstraction. Hegel writes:

in terms of its own abstraction, [this shape of consciousness] actually divides itself into equally abstract extreme terms, that is, into *the simple, unbending cold universality* and into the *discrete, absolute and hard unaccommodating and obstinate* isolation of actual self-consciousness.³⁰

My contention is that these two modes of abstraction, as they appear in the *Phenomenology*, are precisely the earlier analysed two faces of positivity in Hegel’s early writings; namely, ideal activity and the violence of exclusion, on the one hand, and objective activity’s illegitimate claims for universality and authority, on the other. The only difference in the case of his analysis

sovereignty and the (conceptual) foundations of the modern State (cf. M. R. Acosta, “‘The Gorgon’s Head’ Hegel on Law and Violence in the Frankfurt Fragments”, *CR: New Centennial Review* Vol. 14 No. 2 (2014), pp. 29–48).

30 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 590; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 436. The emphasis is mine.

of these two kinds of violence in the *Phenomenology*, is that violence is now presented in its radical destructive-negating form. In clinging to the legitimacy of its claim, be it as empty universality or as the arbitrariness of contingent singularity, consciousness, Hegel writes,

lets nothing break loose so that it would become a free-standing object confronting it. From this, it follows that it cannot amount to a positive work, that is, it can neither amount to universal works of language, nor to those of actuality, nor to the laws and the universal institutions of *conscious* freedom, nor to the deeds and works of *willing* freedom.³¹

It is important to attend here to the doubly destructive character of action. On the one hand, it acts according to the *radical negation* of all that which is not it. Its action is thus violently imposed over all of reality.³² On the other hand, however, nothing positive could result from this radical imposition, neither laws nor universal institutions (produced by a universal will), nor facts or concrete works (resulting from the actions of singular wills). Consequently, the violence of (Modern forms of) abstraction in the *Phenomenology* is not related solely to a *violent imposition*, as was the case in Hegel's earlier texts. It is also not solely guided by the use of *violent measures* that emerge from the immediate negation of its abstract character. Besides all this, the action of

31 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 588; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 434.

32 This consciousness, Hegel writes, "elevates itself to the throne of the world, without any power capable of resisting it". Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 585; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 433. Hegel understands here something certainly characteristic of revolutionary actions; that is, that they can only be effective by way of a radical negation of that which they seek to interrupt. For Hegel, this negative character is intrinsically tied to all true action, that is, to every action that introduces something radically new into the world. The difference, however, between radically revolutionary action (and consequently radically destructive and violent action) and an action conceived in the light of ethical life, is that only in the latter case is consciousness already cognizant of the transgression that it can exercise in the world, and hence, cognizant of the limits of its own claims. See J. Bernstein, "Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel's Poetics of Action", in R. Elridge (ed.), *Beyond Representation: Philosophy and Poetic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 34–65; and A. Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* (Port Chester, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

positivity is presented as nothing other than the production and reproduction of violence, a constant destruction (inasmuch as it is immediate negation) that is effectuated, as an imposition, over all of reality. Violence is not only here a means – a means, for example, to interrupt or neutralize other forms of violence, which in the light of the law would give it, in principle, its legitimate character – but rather it has been turned also and perhaps only into an end: its negative work is the only guarantee of its own subsistence, and its subsistence consists in nothing else but the sacrifice of all.

Even though this all appears more clearly delineated in the *Phenomenology*, I would like to show in what follows that the steps towards this radicalization of the argument – and hence, of Hegel's criticisms of the foundational violence of Modern political forms of abstraction – acquire their first and more thorough exposition in Frankfurt in "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate". I believe that holding in view all the critiques that Hegel develops in each one of these texts opens possibilities for understanding key nuances of each of these arguments that do not evidently come out in an individual study of each text on its own. I hope therefore the reason for this parallel will make itself clearer in the course of the analysis. My main objective, as I announced at the outset of this chapter, is to clarify the relation between abstraction and violence in Hegel's work, and more specifically, to show the relevance of Hegel's early writings and his notion of positivity for a comprehensive understanding of this relationship.

The Abstraction of the Law: Cold Universality and the Fury of Disappearance

The first face of consciousness as absolute freedom in the *Phenomenology* is the experience consciousness has of itself and of the world around it as a "subject and universal will".³³ Consciousness here does not think of itself

33 "The world", Hegel writes, "is for consciousness simply its own will, and this is a universal will." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 584; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 432.

in terms of singularity, but rather, as “pure concept”, it conceives of itself as immediately universal. The key aspect of this shape of consciousness is that, *for it*, this universality is not simply an empty universality. It is not simply “empty thought of the will, posited as lying in a tacit or in a represented consent”.³⁴ What we rather encounter here is a shape of consciousness that Hegel seems to be identifying with type of universality that belongs to Rousseau's conception of the modern State. That is, in Hegel's view, a kind of universal will conceived neither as the sum without remainder of all individuals, nor as the merely abstract result of the transfer of power of each individual. The legitimacy of the authority of the State and its expression in the law finds its foundation here in the fact that each individual “grasps itself as the *concept* of the will”, that is, in the very *form* of universality. This is the form grounding the claims posed by the French Revolution, and the concepts of universal power and sovereignty tied to its demands: “In this absolute freedom, all the social estates (...) are effaced. The individual consciousness that belonged to any such group and which exercised its will and which found its fulfilment there, has sublated its boundaries, and its purpose is the universal purpose, its language the universal law, its work the universal work.”³⁵

It is precisely in the process of producing itself as “universal work”, however, that this universality will have to stumble on its abstract character:

for the universal to reach the point of actually doing something, it must gather itself up into the oneness of individuality and put an individual consciousness in the leading position (...) However, *all other individuals* are thereby excluded from the *totality* of this deed, and they only have a restricted share in it, such that the deed could not be a deed of *actual universal* self-consciousness. Universal freedom can thus produce neither a positive work nor a positive deed, and there remains for it merely the *negative act*. It is merely the *fury* of disappearing.³⁶

All the elements that we have seen so far related to Hegel's critiques of positivity are present here, from the analysis of the empty nature of *ideal*

34 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 584; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 432.

35 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 585; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 433.

36 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 589; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, SS. 435–436.

activity, to the doubly negative character of the kind of work or deed that necessarily results from it. Hegel is interested in bringing to light here the kind of violence lying at the ground of these notions (thus, a kind of violence that does not only result from a misapplication of these ideas, but that is essentially connected to their abstract essence). It is a very peculiar violence since it is easy for it to remain invisible. This is because it operates beyond all individual action, and is usually exercised for and from the universality of the law (sheltered therefore under the cloak of its “legitimacy”). The *truth* of absolute freedom is this hiding and hidden violence that is only revealed in the experience of its extreme actualization: as “abstract self-consciousness”, Hegel writes, it destroys and cancels out “all distinction and all the durable existence of any distinction.”³⁷

Hegel does not pause much longer on this side of the violence belonging to this shape of consciousness. We know that it is related to a “simple and cold inflexible universality”, connected to what Hegel has described as the “fury of disappearing”. Most of the readings of this moment in the *Phenomenology* are too quick to relate “the fury of disappearing” with what comes immediately after it in the text, described as the experience of terror.³⁸ However, these are rather two distinct moments of this same shape of consciousness, two distinct sides of its operation, and thus, two different kinds of violence. Even though closely related, these two forms of violence cannot simply be identified, for their “actors” are different in each case, and so too are their practical effects, as well as the kind of destruction they exert over the reality upon which they act.³⁹

37 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 592; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 437.

38 Moreover, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel speaks of the “fury of destruction”, confounding in this way the two forms of violence that I wish to separate here. The “fury of disappearance” is one thing, and violence, terror and destruction are a different type of violence.

39 The analysis of the fury of disappearing as a type of violence distinct from terror, and the reading of this two moments as distinct and differentiated steps in Hegel’s argument, is something that has been almost completely passed over in the literature on these passages of the *Phenomenology*. For a very illuminating analysis of this moment taking these differences into account, cf. A. Norris, “The Disappearance of the French Revolution in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*”, *The Owl of Minerva*

I believe that only if one pays attention to the development of these criticisms in the earlier fragments, and particularly, to the shape the two sides of positivity take in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, can one then identify these differences and understand all the nuances at play in Hegel's account. If Hegel does not develop in detail the experience of this type of violence in the *Phenomenology*, it is enough to go back to the critiques of legalism in Frankfurt to begin to give a much more concrete face to this violence exercised for and from the abstraction of the law.

Thus, in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, Hegel shows how it is precisely the very same movement that makes the law possible (that is, the movement that links individuals to the law and by which it has “invested” itself with power), that next, and in a paradoxical turn, makes these same individuals *disappear* before the exercise of that power. For Hegel, the positivity of the law compels it to reduce the singularity of its object to an ideal possibility, devoid of all concrete content, due to its abstractness. In order to “judge”, that is to say, in order to exercise its power, the law must subsume its object under the empty universality of its concept.⁴⁰ This

Vol. 44 Nos 1–2 (2012–2013), pp. 37–66. Only in the *Phenomenology*, and already not in the later *Philosophy of Right*, Norris emphasizes, does Hegel focus on this difference that I will continue to analyse here between disappearing and destruction. I really owe this distinction to Norris' paper, and I am thankful also for our more recent conversations about it. My intention here is to trace it back to Hegel's analysis in Frankfurt and connect it therefore to his earlier developments of the notion of positivity.

- 40 Hegel's critique of the law is here closely related with his critique of language, as Werner Hamacher has already indicated very suggestively in his study on these early fragments (cf. W. Hamacher, *Pleroma: Reading in Hegel* [Chicago, IL: Stanford University Press, 1998]). Also, Hegel's reading of the Gospel of John, for example, announces already the kind of questions that he will explicitly pose in later texts, such as the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, connected to the problematic relation between propositional language (which inevitably divides subject and object and necessarily relates to the object in terms of subsumption and abstraction), and “speculative” language (that is able to elevate itself above these divisions and transform itself into the language and experience of the concept). For an analysis of the relation between these two moments of Hegel's language cf. especially J. L. Nancy, *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel's Bon Mots)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

coincides with the impotence at the root of its legitimacy: that which is invested with power is at the same time the movement by which the law shows itself in all its *weakness*.

This subsumption of others under a concept manifested in the law may be called a weakness on the ground that the judge is not strong enough to bear up against them altogether but divides them; he cannot hold out against their independence; he takes them not as they are but as they ought to be ...⁴¹

In its abstraction, the law shows itself to be incapable of conceiving “the wealth of living relations”.⁴² What remains outside of law’s abstract language and thus demarcates, in Hegel’s view, its cold rigidity and inflexibility, is the capacity of connecting itself with the “richness of life”.⁴³ The judgement of the law posits a mode of relation that completely lacks the ability “of feeling everything in the heart of others, of perceiving all the harmony and the dissonance of its being”.⁴⁴ In its judgement, the law cannot but subject everything to the empty universality of its concept. Through this “tyranny of thought”, “the tyranny of judgement”, the law exercises its own weakness.⁴⁵

The law is converted in this way into the actor and only protagonist of a site defined exclusively in accord with its own criteria. Under its reign, everything “lacks a proper content”, everything is empty, without life: “They

41 G. W. F. Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, in *Early Theological Writings*, p. 222. See in German, “Der Geist des Christentums”, *Werke I: Frühe Schriften*, S. 335.

42 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 215; “Der Geist des Christentums”, S. 327.

43 Hegel is making use all along his essay of the very problematic “figural” trope of the Judaic (dead) letter in opposition to a Christian (protestant) “richness” of the living spirit. This tendency, particular to a certain tradition of German Protestantism (of which Hegel is certainly part of), frame Hegel’s opposition to both Judaism and Catholicism in terms of a rejection of “external” and “arbitrary” authority. For a very interesting analysis of how this gets played out in German Enlightenment and particularly in the context of German Romanticism, see Jeffrey Librett’s *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans from Mendelssohn to Wagner* (Chicago, IL: Stanford University Press, 2000).

44 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 248; “Der Geist des Christentums”, S. 307.

45 Hegel, “Grundkonzept zum Geist des Christentums”, S. 314.

are not even something dead – a nullity – yet they are something only in so far as the infinite Object makes them something, i.e., makes them not something which *is*, but something *made* which on its own account has no life, no rights, no love”.⁴⁶ The type of destruction that results from law's positivity is not even then the destruction of death. Disappearance before the law carries with it a much more radical negation, that is, the negation of life itself – and with it, therefore, its relation with death –, the reduction of life to “an animal existence”, Hegel writes, which can be assured only at the expense of all other existence”.⁴⁷

Following these steps, Hegel shows how the law as positivity, as the kind of right exercised from the appearance of legitimacy supplied by its universality, ends up drawing in its foundation a sacrificial circle. In its attempts to shield its own capacity for implementation, its own power, law has to sacrifice all singularity in the name of the preservation of its own universality. The “fury of disappearance”, as stated some years later in the *Phenomenology*, is the operation whereby abstract self-consciousness not only cancels all difference, but all surviving of difference. In “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, Hegel has already shown however that in fact this is the hidden face of the law in its very structure, namely, the movement that is brought to completion in the law's attempt to erase the impotence that results from its abstraction. At the heart of the law everything thus encounters its lethal disposition. “So long as laws are supreme”, Hegel concludes, “so long as there is no escape from them, so long must the individual be sacrificed to the universal, that is, be put to death”.⁴⁸

46 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 191; “Der Geist des Christentums”, S. 283.

47 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 191; “Der Geist des Christentums”, S. 283.

48 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 226; “Der Geist des Christentums”, S. 339. Once again, it is inevitable to hear here the profound anti-Judaism in Hegel's text and the tropes of what has been shown to be a Protestant reaction to Jewish theology pervasive in Germany's philosophical debate at the time (cf. Librett's study quoted above). I cannot attend to this side of Hegel's text, but I also cannot but feel obliged to mention and note the very problematic character of this language. I hope this chapter shows that what is behind my interest is the way in which Hegel is using

Abstraction and State Action: Hard Rigidity and the *Terror of Death*

There is an additional step that needs to be explained and that, from the violence or “fury of disappearance” will develop into another kind of violence. Hegel describes this moment in the *Phenomenology* as the moment of terror, that is, the moment when absolute freedom is no longer exercised exclusively from the abstract institution of the law, but rather transformed into an act of government. He writes:

this *individual* consciousness [the consciousness of absolute freedom] is in the same way immediately conscious of itself as the universal will (...) and in making the transition into activity and into creating objectivity, it is thus not making anything which is individual; it is merely making laws and state-actions.⁴⁹

In the attempt to realize the universal will, namely, in the step from ideality to objectivity, what has been achieved is precisely what was recognized as impossible from the perspective of the universality of the law: “Posited in the element of *being*, [absolute freedom] would mean a *determinate* personality, and it would in truth cease to be universal self-consciousness.”⁵⁰ Determination would mean the end of the universality of this shape of consciousness. Absolute freedom’s step into action implies therefore the conscious exercise of action as *exclusion* (consciousness, Hegel says, “excludes the remaining individuals from its deed”).⁵¹ This exclusion still thinks of itself as being justified in the light of the kind of conviction provided to consciousness by the universality of the ideal, that is, the certainty that

a theological language and vocabulary to give shape to what will become in later years a philosophico-historical critique of Modern forms of sovereignty and power (not disconnected, of course, from theological and religious notions). It is to this side of the argument that I would like to take Hegel’s notions of positivity and abstraction.

49 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 587; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 434.

50 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 588; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 435.

51 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 591; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 437.

action here, including the injustice that it brings with it in its operation, is the only possible means for the necessary actualization of the ideal.

We have here, then, once again, the element of *authority*, which Hegel had put in connection in his early writings with the arbitrariness of positivity. The objectivity that results from this sense of authority exerts itself here by means of an action that finds the absolute foundation of its legitimacy in the abstract mechanism of its movement. Consciousness forgets in the process that at the root of its foundation there is nothing else but the ephemeral, the contingent, which has been posited (and for that matter believed – action assumes here a kind of faith, a secular fanaticism) immediately (and abstractly) as necessary and universal. We encounter here therefore the kind of activity identified in the Frankfurt fragments with a second moment or side of positivity. It is the necessary counterpart of what we saw above as the tyranny proper to the law. If the latter is exercised from the law itself, this one is now exercised from the perspective of the protection promised by its authority: “the tyrannical idea” Hegel writes in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, “is protective, because each one is the favorite child of its idea”.⁵²

Hegel speaks here no longer of the law but rather of State or government action. In its attempt to disguise particularity under the form of universality, government knows and recognizes itself *as* faction. It is however a side or a faction *protected* by the idea – this is the way it resolves the contradiction between the idea of itself as governing and its consciousness of itself as determined and singularized will. This means nevertheless that it sees itself forced to actualize time and again the exclusion found at the ground of its own determination. Thus, Hegel writes:

Outside the infinite unity in which nothing but they, the favorites, can share, everything is matter (the Gorgon's head turned everything to stone), a stuff, loveless, with no rights, something accursed which, as soon as they have power enough, they treat as and then assign to its proper place [death] if it attempts to stir.⁵³

52 Hegel, “Grundkonzept zum Geist des Christentums”, S. 303.

53 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 188; “Der Geist des Christentums”, S. 280.

The *implementation* of the law, its enforcement, becomes, as “state” or “government” action, the worst of all the tyrannies: “... when they themselves were powerful enough to actualize their idea of unity – then they exercised their dominion mercilessly with *the most revolting and harshest tyranny, and utterly extirpated all life*.”⁵⁴ The petrifying effect – the image of Gorgon’s head could not be clearer – coincides here with the “hard rigidity of the absolute” that Hegel relates in the *Phenomenology* with the other side of absolute freedom. What Hegel has in mind in these descriptions, we know, is the historical experience of the *régime of terror* in revolutionary France. Or, better, what the experience of the régime of terror shows in its historical reality is the exemplary development, perhaps also paradigmatic, of a violence that inhabits the very idea of “government” or “state action”.

Thus, what Hegel describes as the “arid destruction” comes to be actualized as “the pure terror of the negative that has neither anything positive nor anything fulfilling in it.”⁵⁵ As he writes in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, “for it is only over death that unity hovers.”⁵⁶ The violence of this side of positivity is indeed therefore the terror of death. This is the final manifestation of a kind of violence that has become beyond all means an end in itself. Consequently, it cannot attain any other signification different from the cold and empty reproduction of its own destructive power:

The sole work and deed of universal freedom is thus *death*, namely, a *death* which has no inner amplitude and no inner fulfillment, since what is negated is the unfulfilled empty “point” of the absolutely free self. It is therefore the coldest, emptiest death of all, having no more meaning than chopping off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.⁵⁷

With this, we arrive to the other side of that very peculiar “work” achieved by absolute freedom. We arrive here also to the other side of its truth. “The

54 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 188; “Der Geist des Christentums”, S. 280.

55 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 594; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 439.

56 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 188; “Der Geist des Christentums”, S. 280.

57 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 590; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 436.

terror of death", Hegel writes, "is the intuition of [absolute freedom's] negative essence".⁵⁸ This is the final, very concrete result of the absolute transition from pure thought to pure matter. It is a doubly destructive result in its execution – as was also, as we saw above, the double sacrificial circle traced by the experience of the law and developed by Hegel with particular care in "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate". The purest expression of positivity, Hegel concludes in the *Phenomenology*, is that "*universal will*, which in this, its final abstraction, has nothing positive and thus can give nothing in return for the sacrifice".⁵⁹

What I have attempted to do in the previous pages is to show, most of all, the relevance of Hegel's early writings for an understanding not only of his later developments of a "typology" of violence,⁶⁰ but also, and even more so, for an elaboration of a philosophical critique of violence today. I believe that Hegel's investigation of the gestation and foundation of our ideas of right, law and sovereignty, together with his account of the dangers involved in their modern (and hence abstract) determinations, becomes an invaluable source for a philosophical grammar of violence. It is also clear to me that, going specifically to Hegel's own work, his early analyses of the violence of positivity illuminate in a very particular way his later accounts of the same phenomenon in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I hope I have at least proven that it is very easy to overlook the very subtle but important distinctions Hegel is introducing in his analysis of the French Revolution when one does not have into account the development in his early writings of the concept and the violence proper to abstraction and positivity.

Hegel's attention to the nuances of the connection between violence and abstraction, abstraction and positivity, and positivity and the foundations of our modern conceptions of State and law, prove to be very relevant

58 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 592; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 437.

59 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 594; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 439.

60 I owe this idea to Angelica Nuzzo's current work on Hegel, particularly in connection to her reading of the *Science of Logic*. She developed these ideas in her lecture course for the *Collegium Phaenomenologicum 2014*, which I had the privilege to attend.

for understanding a very specific kind of violence – one that, as many contemporary authors have attempted to show, remains hidden, but still operative, under our most current conceptions of democracy. The two faces of violence I have tried to describe up to this point embody the dangers that underlie a form of positivity that, in its absolute abstraction, breaks from the economy of means and end usually associated with a liberal critique of violence. The violence of positivity is one that, Hegel insists, “can give nothing in return for the sacrifice”. It is a violence for which the distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy disappears before the anarchic, completely abstract, movement that underlies the basis of all sovereignty, and that Hegel would have seen already with total clarity in the historical birth of our modern ideas of right, government, State and law. It is also a violence that divides itself into at least two different and complementary destructive operations. A development of these ideas would have to lead to a much more detailed analysis of the connections between the destructive power of the law, on the one hand, and the destructive power of sovereignty, on the other. These destructive powers also entail an erasure of their traces, and hence, the imposition of an oblivion that makes history and memory all the more necessary for the present. This was always Hegel’s claim, and in following his invitation, one should start by remembering his own analysis of the historicity of his present, and of the philosophical foundations for the need to turn the crisis of the present into the possibility of its critique.

4 Hegel's Critique of Kant and "The Positivity of the Christian Religion"

Natural law or philosophical right is different from positive right, but it would be a grave misunderstanding to distort this difference into an opposition or antagonism.

— HEGEL, *Philosophy of Right*, §3 Anm

The two most substantial texts by Hegel collected under the title of *Early Theological Writings* are "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", written in Bern between 1795 and 1796, and "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate", composed in Frankfurt between 1798 and 1800. The evolution, or, as some would claim, revolution, from the former essay to the latter lends itself to being presented in the following abbreviated fashion: in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", Hegel is, essentially, a Kantian who advances the cause of autonomy and understands God through the lens of morality; as such he engages in a vehement critique of positive or dogmatic forms of religious expression and practice;¹ in "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" essay Hegel breaks with these Kantian allegiances and, with reference to the idea of *love* and a more fully developed conception of the *tragic*, condemns Kant's moral, political and religious thought as a form of positivity in its own right.

While Hegel's commitment to Kantian moral philosophy in the Bern period is pronounced, the rupture with Kant and the "moral world view"

1 Terry Pinkard draws this connection between "positivity" and "dogmatism". T. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 11.

that comes to the fore so dramatically in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay is, upon closer inspection, anticipated in “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay. As I read “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, there is a subterranean tension between (i) Hegel’s early Kantian project of bridging the divide that existed in his own time between our capacity for rational self-determination and its concrete realization, and (ii) his commitment to an ideal of unification in tragic beauty that he attributes to ancient Greek *Volksreligion*. With a mind to these two elements, we can better understand the inherent logic of Hegel’s explicit break with Kant in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay and beyond, as well as the motivations for his “postmoral” conception of ethical, political and religious life.² The unification achieved by Greek *Volksreligion* can be conceived as a form of transcendence that takes place within social life. Hegel’s critique of “positivity” stands, in turn, as a rejection of “pure” or abstract transcendence, a rejection that is expressed in the 1797 fragment “The Oldest Program toward a System in German Idealism” by the call for “the absolute freedom of all spirits who bear the intellectual world within themselves and who dare not seek either God or immortality *outside themselves*”.³ My contention is that Hegel aspires throughout his early theological writings to articulate both a form of transcendence that exists without reference to an otherworldly “beyond” and a form of fulfilment of the moral law that is motivated by something other than fear or mere obedience. Hegel’s overt break with Kantian practical philosophy will come when it is judged to be guilty of presenting the moral law as an internal, yet alien and autocratic, force.

- 2 Stephen Houlgate attributes the term “postmoral” to Emil Fackenheim. S. Houlgate, “Religion, Morality and Forgiveness in Hegel’s Philosophy”, in W. Desmond, E.-O. Onnasch and P. Cruysberghs (eds), *Philosophy and Religion in German Idealism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 2004), p. 83.
- 3 G. W. F. Hegel, “The Oldest Program toward a System in German Idealism”, trans. D. F. Krell, *The Owl of Minerva* Vol. 17 No. 1 (Autumn 1985), p. 10.

Kant versus Positivity

A guiding question of "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay is that of how the religious tradition founded in Jesus's name came to betray his moral teachings. The influence of Kant on the young Hegel's attempt to make sense of and evaluate the essence, history and current state of Christianity is undeniable. Not only is Christianity grasped in Kantian terms, but Hegel's study of Christianity in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay can also be understood as determining the role that Christianity might play in advancing the Kantian moral project itself.

Hegel begins the essay by stating that a declaration of religious conviction has no place in the kind of investigation upon which he is embarking. Instead, we must adhere to the following principle when attempting to understand and evaluate Christianity: "the aim and essence of all true religion, our religion included, is human morality, and all the more detailed doctrines of Christianity ... have their worth and their sanctity appraised according to their close or distant connection with that aim."⁴ If religious doctrine and practices are to be evaluated according to the moral law, Kant provides the model for a philosophically rigorous articulation of this law. In a text by Hegel entitled "The Life of Jesus" (July 1795), the proximity of Jesus and Kant is at times so close that they are virtually conflated. At one point, Hegel has Jesus say, "'To act only on principles that you can will to become universal laws among men, laws no less binding on you than on them' – this is the fundamental law of morality, the sum and substance of all moral legislation and the sacred books of all people."⁵ Hegel's essay "The Life of Jesus" is notable for the rigorous consistency with which he passes over all the miraculous acts found in the Gospel accounts of Jesus. The crucifixion is included, but not the resurrection. The broader point is

4 G. W. F. Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 68.

5 G. W. F. Hegel, "The Life of Jesus", in P. Fuss and J. Dobbins (eds), *Three Essays (1793–1795)* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 116.

that Jesus is essentially a moral teacher and all genuine moral teachers say the same thing. Thus, Hegel claims that “Jesus found the highest moral principles there [in the sacred Jewish texts]; he did not set up new ones.”⁶ And when Hegel comes to compare Jesus and Socrates in “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay, they do not differ in the essential content of their moral teaching, but only in the language with which they conveyed it (we will return to this difference below).

Hegel places this universal morality in stark opposition to “positivity”. At the most general level, positivity signals death. Positive laws, doctrine and practices are defined by the way in which they have been severed from their vital source in human autonomy. Positive laws have the character of statutory commands, positive doctrine is experienced as a litany of “dead formulas” that are followed with “slavish obedience” and positive practices are described as rote and mechanical in nature.⁷ They are all understood as imposed by an alien, external and ultimately autocratic authority. As such, they produce a society populated by “lifeless machines” devoted to the “monkish preoccupation with petty, mechanical, spiritless, and trivial practices.”⁸ The paradigmatic example of Christian positivity for Hegel in this regard is the attribution of *miracles* to Jesus, for this leads to grounding the validity of Jesus’s words on the authority of his personality and his miraculous deeds, rather than evaluating them according to the standard of reason or one’s living sense of right and duty.⁹ Positivity of this kind occurs, then, when the historically and culturally specific dimension of religious practice becomes dominant at the expense of the common moral essence of religion. Positivity also arises when religious rituals are severed from the indigenous practices of the community. As an example, Hegel offers the continuation in his own time of the *pedilavium*, the rite of the prelate washing the feet of the poor. For Hegel its origin was the Jewish tradition of hospitality: after walking in open sandals on dusty roads a

6 Hegel, “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, p. 69.

7 *Ibid.* pp. 68–69.

8 *Ibid.* p. 69, translation altered.

9 See Hegel, “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, p. 78.

host would present water to guests in order to clean their feet.¹⁰ While the performance of the ritual in late eighteenth-century Germany was clearly meant to affirm the principles of humility and equality, the act of washing the feet of the poor is no longer grounded in a concrete, recognizable act of hospitality practised by the community. It exemplifies positivity because it has lost this "living" character.

In "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay, then, Hegel presents a "Kantian" Jesus to the extent that Hegel emphasizes Jesus's confrontation with political and religious positivity in the service of reasserting morality as a grounding principle of action. In light of this, we can again pose the question Hegel comes to focus on himself, namely, does the religious tradition founded in Jesus's name also serve the ends of morality as its founder did? In "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", he focuses on the ways in which it does not. His position is that the long history of Christianity unfolds in such a way as to undermine the original moral essence of Jesus; a struggle against positive religion in the name of "free virtue" eventually produces another form of positivity.¹¹ Further, Hegel draws an historical analogy between the world in which Jesus lived and Hegel's own. Jesus confronts an analogous kind of ossified cultural, political, and religious life to that which Hegel himself faces in modernity. Hegel does not, however, turn to the historical Jesus solely because of the contemporary relevance of this earlier challenge to politico-religious dogmatism. Since this original Christian challenge is an undeniable historical precondition of Hegel's own times, his accounts of the history of Christianity also stands as a warning to the present.¹² Can a challenge to entrenched positivity occur *in modernity* without reproducing what it challenges?

10 I discuss the comic dimension of this fall into positivity in P. Wake, *Tragedy in Hegel's Early Theological Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 59–60.

11 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 71.

12 See Wake, *Tragedy*, p. 40.

Modernity and its Fulfilment

Hegel's allegiance to the Kantian Enlightenment project in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay, then, must be understood in terms of his diagnosis of modernity as mired in a distinct form of positivity. This diagnosis is one that he shares, in broad strokes, with Kant. Both understand the modern project as the self-conscious articulation and defence of the idea of human autonomy, and both acknowledge that despite our potential to be autonomous, it is lacking in contemporary cultural, political and religious institutions. Thus, when Kant poses the question in 1784, "Do we presently live in an *enlightened* age?", he responds, "No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*."¹³ While nothing is required to achieve enlightenment save "the freedom to use reason publicly in all matter", Kant claims that *today* "on all sides I hear: '*Do not argue!*': The officer says, 'Do not argue, drill!' The taxman says, 'Do not argue, pay!' The pastor says, 'Do not argue, believe!' (Only one ruler in the world says, '*Argue* as much as you want about what you want, *but obey!*')."¹⁴ Contemporary religious services are for Kant an example of this lack of enlightenment; we see a similarity with Hegel's critique of positivity when Kant writes, "The leading-string of holy tradition with its appendages of statutes and observances, which in its time did good service, become bit by bit dispensable, yea, finally, when man enters upon adolescence, it becomes a fetter."¹⁵

How, then, for Kant are we to progress from an age of enlightenment to an enlightened age? We can consider the fulfilment of the promise of human autonomy from the perspective of both the individual and the collective. At the level of *individual* moral action, Hegel locates a moment of fulfilment within Kantian practical reasoning itself. The categorical imperative allows us, as individuals, to determine objectively what our moral duty

13 I. Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), p. 44.

14 *Ibid.* p. 42.

15 I. Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 112.

is. The unique feeling of *respect* is born of the recognition of our capacity to give the moral law to ourselves. As Kant writes in the second *Critique*, "respect for the moral law, therefore, is a feeling produced by an intellectual cause, and this feeling is the only one which we can know completely *a priori* and the necessity of which we can discern".¹⁶ The feeling of respect, then, is unique precisely because it is provoked by the ability of the will to command itself. A pure moral act, an act motivated by the thought of duty alone, puts aside, or brackets, inclinations, so that nothing is left to determine the will but "objectively the *law* and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law".¹⁷ In this way the moral law is fulfilled at the *individual* level. If we take Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" essay as a model, fulfilling the project of modern enlightenment at the *collective* level ought to involve the slow process of reforming the way that a people thinks. This, in turn, will require that we overcome our laziness and cowardice, summon the audacity to think for ourselves, and articulate our well-reasoned views publicly, that is, before the "entire *literate* world".¹⁸ The compromise that Kant offers is that so long as our right to use reason publicly is assured, we will uphold the various institutional roles that we play in our society; that is, we will be obedient subjects, soldiers, taxpayers, and parishioners.

What is notable about Hegel's approach in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay to bridging the gap between our capacity to be moral and its realization is his focus on the role that "collective subjectivities"¹⁹ might play in achieving this end (along with the Christian subject, he considers Greek, Jewish, and modern subjects). These "collective subjectivities" are situated between the individual and universal "humanity" as such, and are united by customary norms, common written and unwritten laws, shared historical and mythological references, and a collective

16 I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. White Beck (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1993), p. 77.

17 I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 14.

18 Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 43.

19 This is Lukács's phrase. See G. Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, trans. R. Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1975), p. 7.

imaginary landscape. It should be noted that while Hegel's understanding of why the enlightenment project remains unfulfilled is framed in terms of these "collective subjectivities", he does not avoid addressing individual moral agency altogether. When he does, he writes, in the spirit of Kant, "reason sets up moral, necessary, and universally valid laws. ... Now the problem is to make these laws subjective, to make them into maxims, to find motives for them."²⁰ In determining a properly moral intention, Hegel continues to reference Kant: "the sole moral motive, respect for the moral law, can be aroused only in a subject in whom the law is itself the legislator, from whose inner consciousness this law proceeds."²¹ When in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay Hegel refers explicitly to the "*complementum* of the laws",²² as Jesus presents it in the Sermon on the Mount, he does so, again, in explicitly Kantian moral terms. Jesus's aim was to confront the positive habit of mind defining his contemporaries, and he does so in the service of cultivating in its place a properly moral disposition:

He tried to show them how little the observance of these [positive religious] commands constituted the essence of virtue, since that essence is the spirit of acting from respect for duty because it is a duty. ... Once unfettered by the positive commands which were supposed to usurp the place of morality, their reason would have been able to follow its own commands. But it was too immature, too unpracticed in following its own commands. It was unacquainted with the enjoyment of self-won freedom, and consequently it was subjected once more to the yoke of formalism.²³

When Hegel condemns this legalistic thinking that Jesus combats as "formalism", it is a formalism that is starkly *opposed* to Kantian moral thinking.

The importance of "collective subjectivities" in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" is illustrated by the fact that Hegel raises this Kantian account of individual moral motivation in order to contrast it with the motivational structure characteristic of Christianity as such: "the Christian religion proclaims that the moral law is something outside us and something

20 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 143.

21 *Ibid.* p. 144.

22 *Ibid.* p. 99.

23 *Ibid.*

given, and thus it must strive to create respect for it in some other way. The very conception of a positive religion permits us to assume that such a religion will be characterized by its exhibiting the moral law as something given; if it is given, then virtue becomes an art of a very complicated kind in contrast with an uncorrupted moral sense which is in a position to decide any issue on the spot because it dares to make its decisions for itself."²⁴ The Christian view that posits the source of the moral law outside of ourselves gives rise to a positive, casuistic system. The danger of a system of this kind is that we will come to rely on it to the point of undercutting our very capacity to give the law to ourselves. Further, the Christian reduction of morality to casuistry is accompanied by an "asceticism which leaves free no thoughts however private, leaves uncontrolled no action, no involuntary glance, no enjoyment of whatever kind, whether joy, love, friendship, or sociability."²⁵ We will return to the role that *casuistry* and *asceticism* play in Hegel's looming break with Kant, but, to reiterate a point made earlier, the overall effect is that they usurp the freedom grounding genuine morality and imposes a kind of *mechanical* mode of being.

Hegel undertakes this analysis of Christian positivity and the history that gave rise to it in part because of the role that it has played in shaping his own contemporary world, and this analysis is, in turn, a crucial part of his answer to the question of why he lives in an age of enlightenment and not an enlightened age. Hegel's response, again, clearly reflects the Kantian enlightenment position:

once the church's system ignores reason it can be nothing save a system which despises man. The powers of the human mind have a domain of their own, and Kant has separated off this domain for science. This salutary separation has not been made by the church in its legislative activity, and *centuries have still to elapse* before the European mind learns to make and recognize this distinction in practical life and in legislation, although the Greeks had been brought to this point of their own accord by their sound intuition. In Greek religion, or in any other whose underlying principle is a

24 *Ibid.* p. 144.

25 *Ibid.* p. 136.

pure morality, the moral commands of reason, which are subjective, were not treated or set up as if they were the objective rules with which the understanding deals.²⁶

We see from this passage that Hegel thinks, with Kant, that progress toward greater enlightenment will arise slowly. We also see very clearly how the shape that Christianity has assumed in modernity is a source of immaturity that must be overcome – again, slowly. Finally, we see that when Hegel criticizes the Christian codification of the moral law and the positivity that he finds in contemporary religious and political practices, it is according to the criterion of both Kantian moral reasoning *and* what he calls Greek *Volksreligion*. On the surface, it may seem as if these constitute the *same* criterion, for Hegel speaks of Greek religion as a manifestation of the pure morality that Kant has expressed in rigorous philosophical form. And yet, Hegel's account of Greek *Volksreligion* subtly undermines this easy conflation.

Volksreligion versus Positivity

Hegel develops the idea of *Volksreligion* as early as 1793, in a text known as “*Religion ist eine ...*”, and, in English, “The Tübingen Essay”. *Volksreligionen* – Hegel also calls them *public* and *sensuous* religions – are, at heart, *anti-ascetic*. In this essay, he prefaces his discussion of *Volksreligion* by pointing out how the enthralling stories we tell of idealized religious figures produce *dissatisfaction* with the world that we actually encounter in our daily lives, for this world and those who inhabit it fall so far short of these exalted ideals. This leads, in turn, to the cultivation of a “peevish disposition” and a terror at the fact that sensuality is “the predominant element in all human action and striving.” Hegel claims, by contrast, that “however scrupulously a system of morality may require us to separate *in abstracto* pure morality from sensuality and make the latter more subservient to the former, when we consider man's life as a whole we must make equally full allowance for

26 *Ibid.* p. 143, my italics, translation altered.

his sensuality."²⁷ He is not discounting the exemplarity of a will that is determined by respect for the moral law; rather, he is emphasizing how rarely it actually occurs, if it occurs at all, and thus he is advocating instead for an ethics that acknowledges the place of both reason and sensuality. If sensuality cannot be dismissed or bracketed, reason should be thought of as, to use Hegel's own metaphor, the salt in a well-prepared meal: it ought to permeate and flavour the whole, while never lumping together to the point of being recognizable or isolable as such. Producing this harmony is the proper goal of a *Volksreligion*. It is *sensuous* in that it attempts to influence our sensuality *through* the sensual, and so does not aspire to deny our sensuous life or have it submit wholesale to the dictates of reason. It is *public* because it is not just concerned with abstract theological questions (these can be addressed by reason alone), but with the way in which religion influences the thinking of a whole people in the service of uplifting "the spirit of a nation so as to awaken in its soul the so often dormant sense of its true self worth."²⁸ The presence of religion is revealed "not merely by hands clasped together, knees bent, and heart humbled before the holy, but by the way it suffuses the entire scope of human inclination ... and makes its presence felt everywhere – although only mediately or, if I may so express it, negatively, in and through the cheerful enjoyment of human satisfactions."²⁹ This is to say that its influence is discreet, and it works through cultivating both the heart and the imagination to protect the freedom and spontaneity of human action. Hegel summarizes the traits of a *Volksreligion* in this way:

- I Its teaching must be founded on universal reason.
- II Imagination, the heart, and the senses must not go away empty-handed in the process.
- III It must be so constituted that all of life's needs, including public and official transactions, are bound up with it.³⁰

27 G. W. F. Hegel, "The Tübingen Essay", in P. Fuss and J. Dobbins (eds), *Three Essays* (1793–1795) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 31.

28 *Ibid.* p. 32.

29 *Ibid.* p. 36.

30 *Ibid.* p. 49.

A *Volksreligion* that fulfils these criteria will act as a bulwark against “silly superstitions” and “the greatest ecclesiastical and political slavery”.³¹ It will also aid us in avoiding the tendency toward envy and a guilt-ridden conscience, two traits that undercut the human capacity for virtuous action and a “delight in life itself”.³²

The model of a successful *Volksreligion* is that of the ancient Greeks. When Hegel illustrates how their religious doctrine and practices fulfil the three traits of a *Volksreligion*, he consistently contrasts their successes with Christianity’s failures.

I The doctrine of a *Volksreligion* must be in accordance with what we can call, after Kant, the dictates of pure practical reason, and as such, it is both universal and simple. It must not be designed for a rarified caste of wise individuals, but for the specific level of morality of a particular people. This approach to doctrine ought to avoid the kind of debates over theological minutiae that Hegel characterizes as “bickering”, and that he sees leading to factiousness, rigidity and intolerance.³³ An example that he gives of an inappropriate expression of a Christian principle is the reduction of the idea of benevolent providence to the cold, dogmatic conviction that “everything turns out for the best”.³⁴ In the face of tragic loss and the inevitable sorrow that this loss will produce, one would, according to this principle, be forced into the position of either denying one’s natural feelings (“despite what I feel, this loss, like everything that occurs, is for the best”) or abandoning the principle (“this principle cannot be reconciled with my loss, thus the principle must go”).

By contrast, Hegel presents the core Greek religious belief in a two-fold manner: (i) “the gods favor those who are good, and leave evildoers to the tender mercies of a frightful Nemesis”; (ii) “misfortune was misfortune, pain was pain. What had happened could not be altered. There was no point in brooding over whatever such things might mean, since their

31 *Ibid.* p. 47.

32 *Ibid.* p. 36.

33 *Ibid.* pp. 49–50.

34 *Ibid.* p. 51.

moira, their *anankaia tyche*, was blind."³⁵ The first moment of this belief fulfils the imperative of a *Volksreligion* to found its teaching on universal reason. The second reflects a recognition of and respect for "the course of natural necessity". This second moment has the virtue of reconciling the Greeks with the inevitable pain and misfortune that is fated to human beings with our "limited perspective and dependence on nature". This allows them to avoid the "unbearable anger, the despondency and discontent we feel", because we moderns have not been reconciled through our religious beliefs and practices with necessity in this same way.³⁶ We lack the rituals that relieve the tragic guilt which arises when we choose what is right, and yet, in doing so, contravene another's right.³⁷

II The Christian imagination has a tendency toward either childish or terrifying images. This is the case because, according to Hegel, the spirit of his religion, so weighted down by words and reason, has "banished all the beautiful coloration of sense as well as everything that has charm", and thus diminished the capacity for delight in beautiful images.³⁸ More importantly, Hegel indicates that what animates the Christian imagination is too often a notion of sacrifice that sees its purpose as ingratiating ourselves with God in order to secure reward or mitigate punishment. This is similar to the position Plato attributes to Euthyphro when Euthyphro agrees that piety is the sort of bartering skill that knows how to give to and beg from the gods (Euthyphro 14c–d). When Hegel appeals to the Greeks in this context, however, it is because he thinks they offer an example of a gentler, more universal and more original idea of sacrifice. Greek sacrifices were an innocent expression of gratitude: "Thinking of Nemesis before partaking of any pleasure, it offered its god the first fruits, the flower of every possession, inviting him into its home confident that he would abide there willingly. The frame of mind that offered such a sacrifice was far removed from any

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.* p. 52.

37 R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 254.

38 Hegel, "The Tübingen Essay", p. 53.

notion of having hereby atoned for its sins or expiated some portion of their justly deserved punishment.”³⁹

III Finally, as a means of cultivating the imagination and heart such that the doctrine of a religion permeate the life of a community, Hegel mentions folk festivals and the sacred songs grounded in the indigenous music of the people. Here he explicitly references Greek tragedy, and the politico-religious festivals in which they were embedded. Indeed, these festivals are presented as the fulfilment of the ideal of a *Volksreligion*. Their effect was not to inculcate a sense of shame through imposing excessively stringent or otherwise unrealistic demands on people, but instead they were, to quote Hegel, “a friend to all life’s feelings”, from the serious to the light-hearted to those of “bacchantic excess”.⁴⁰ Greek *Volksreligion* does not stand above or apart from the life of the community and intrude or impose on it like a nag, scold, pedagogue, or tyrant; to have a real effect on the people, it arrives as a welcome guest, a friend who helps to cultivate noble sentiments in the service of freedom. And today?

But our religion would train people to be citizens of heaven, gazing ever upward, making our most human feelings seem alien. Indeed at the great Eucharist dressed in colors of mourning and with downcast eyes, even here, at what is supposed to be a celebration of human brotherhood, we fear we might contract venereal disease from the brother who drank out of the communal chalice before. ... How different were the Greeks! They approached the altars of their friendly gods clad in the colors of joy, their faces open invitations to friendship and love, beaming with good cheer.⁴¹

If modernity is, for Hegel, characterized by the *severing* of reason and sensuousness, duty and desire, we see here in rather vivid terms what this means more concretely. We also see the degree to which the critical dimension of Hegel’s account of modernity is oriented by his interpretation of the ancient Greek *polis* as an historical realization of the idea of autonomy.

39 *Ibid.* p. 54.

40 *Ibid.* p. 55.

41 *Ibid.* p. 56.

As Hegel writes, "Greek ... religion was a religion for free peoples only";⁴² and this Greek manifestation of autonomy is grounded in the *immanence* and *tragic beauty* of its *Volksreligion*.

The ideal that animates *Volksreligion*, the ideal of a concrete unification of reason, sensibility, and imagination, does not play the same prominent role in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay as it does in "The Tübingen Essay". Nevertheless, Greece is still very much presented as an ethical ideal and a counterpoint to the positivity of historical Christianity. The embodiment this Greek ideal, however, is not Oedipus or Antigone and the plays in which their stories were re-enacted, but *Socrates* and the philosophical schools he inspired. Indeed, Hegel makes the point that while Socrates and his friends did not actively distinguish themselves from the accepted faith of the *polis* (as the early Christians did), they nevertheless regarded this public faith with indifference, for they recognized "no judge other than reason".⁴³ As such, Hegel presents the philosophical schools as avoiding the positivity that comes to afflict the early Christian sects. At the same time, Hegel claims that this strict adherence to rationality as a guide for living did not alienate philosophy from the broader *polis*. Hegel underscores how Socrates and his friends were embedded and at home in the larger Athenian republic, and how they absorbed its "democratic spirit". This is to say, Hegel does not dwell on the tension between philosophy and the *polis* that Socrates's execution so clearly reveals; instead, he emphasizes the fact that Socrates "fought for his native land, had fulfilled all duties of a free citizen as a brave soldier in war and a just judge in peace."⁴⁴ Socrates's friends also reflected this non-alienation from the civic and familial institutions of the free *polis*, and Hegel illustrates their autonomy by the fact that they did not remain passive pupils of Socrates, but often founded schools of their own – "in their own right they were men as great as Socrates".⁴⁵ This social harmony that accompanies the individual autonomy of Greek citizens stands in stark contrast to Hegel's account of the disciples of Jesus

42 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 154.

43 *Ibid.* p. 86.

44 *Ibid.* p. 82.

45 *Ibid.*

who he presents as withdrawn from and ultimately opposed to contemporary political and familial institutions; unlike the friends of Socrates, they are portrayed, for the most part, as passive disciples of Jesus, rather than his equals.

Like an ideal *Völkreligion*, then, as described in “The Tübingen Essay”, the teachings and practices of Socrates and his friends were founded on universal reason. Like their free Greek compatriots generally, they “obeyed laws laid down by themselves”. And this portrait of autonomy *qua* philosophy seems for Hegel to be compatible with the spirit animating the citizen of the Greek republic generally:

The idea of his country or of his state was the invisible and higher reality for which he strove, which impelled him to effort; it was the final end of *his* world or in his eyes the final end of *the* world, an end which he found manifested in the realities of his daily life or which he himself co-operated in manifesting and maintaining. Confronted by this idea, his own individuality vanished; it was only this idea’s maintenance, life, and persistence that he asked for, and these were things which he himself could make realities.⁴⁶

The transcendence of one’s individuality occurs *immanently*, that is, within the purview of the life of the *polis*, and freedom involves being at home in and through others. Yet at the same time that Hegel claims that philosophy, with its strict adherence to rationality, is not alienated from the broader *polis*, he also seems to acknowledge obliquely the limits of this view. He claims that an *individualized* conception of transcendence as personal immortality only arises with the *destruction* of the free *polis*, and this form of transcendence is directly related to Platonic thought: “Cato turned to Plato’s *Phaedo* only when his world, his republic, hitherto the highest order of things in his eyes, had been destroyed; at that point only did he take flight to a higher order.”⁴⁷

A subtle tension can be gleaned at this point between Hegel’s Greek and Kantian ideals. There is a kind of automatic or unreflective quality to the

46 *Ibid.* p. 154.

47 *Ibid.* p. 155.

harmony that Hegel finds in the free Greek *polis*. What is the source of this free union grounded in self-governance? As cited above, "the Greeks had been brought to this point automatically by their sound intuition".⁴⁸ This seems to be at odds with the reflective character of Kantian practical philosophy,⁴⁹ as is the inherently social nature of autonomy exemplified by the Greek *polis*.⁵⁰ Although there is little overt reference to tragedy in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", an intimation of a supra-moral, tragic dimensions can be found in a contemporaneous fragment entitled, "Difference between the Imaginative Religion of the Greeks and Positive Religion of the Christians". In this text, Hegel describes the superiority of the Greek "heathen" religion precisely because it offers no promise of forgiveness and no faith in a wise and beneficence Providence.⁵¹ He argues further that the idea of a perfectly moral God, unlike the Greek gods who possessed human frailties, arises only with the end of the free Greek republic.⁵² Stepping back a little further, it is difficult not to read passages like these, along with Hegel's aspirations in "The Tübingen Essay" to unite reason and sensibility in a higher union, and see an anticipation of his later critiques of the formalism, rigorism and emptiness of Kantian moral

48 *Ibid.* p. 143.

49 Consider the Third Thesis in Kant's 1784 essay, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent": "Nature has willed that man, entirely by himself, produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical organization of his animal existence and partake in no other happiness or perfection than what he himself, independently of instinct, can secure through his own reason." I. Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent", in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983), p. 31.

50 We can think in this regard of Hegel's famous description of Spirit as "this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'." G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §177. Hegel's view that autonomy is only achieved in a community distinguishes him from Kant. See Williams, *Tragedy*, p. 80.

51 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 152.

52 See *ibid.* p. 157.

philosophy.⁵³ As noted above, Hegel will come to explicitly articulate the need to overcome Kantian moralism in the name of a richer, more complete notion of ethical fulfilment in his 1797 essay “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”. In the spirit of his Greek ideal, he writes in this text that “the need to unite subject with object, to unite feeling, and feeling’s demand for objects, with the intellect, to unite them in something beautiful, in a god, by means of the imagination, is the supreme need of the human spirit and the urge of religion.”⁵⁴ As I have argued, “The Positivity of Christianity” essay is also animated by the need to fulfil the moral law, but Hegel does not understand this lack of fulfilment as a *product* of Kantian morality itself.

The tension between Hegel’s commitment to the Kantian version of the enlightenment project and to the view that *Volksreligion* is the means of fulfilling it can be posed in this way: if it is possible according to Kant’s analysis of respect to overcoming the opposition between the moral law and action, between our duty and our desires, *within* practical reason itself, what is the need for *Volksreligion* at all? “The Tübingen Essay” provides a response. Because we are not perfectly rational beings, the aspiration to bracket our inclination and passions in the service of reaching the exalted goal of pure moral action is rare, if not impossible, and so it leads to perverse effects. We must cultivate these inclinations rather than deny the inevitable motivational presence of them. Yet what Hegel raises in “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay, beyond this earlier solution, is the danger that cultivating the imagination and the heart will *in itself* undercut the moral core of the religion. This danger becomes acute when we are asked to intervene in a culture that is already corrupted by positivity, dogmatism, and political and ecclesiastical autocracy. Hegel’s break with Kant will occur

53 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address in a substantive way Hegel’s later critique of Kant. John McCumber provides a succinct list of Hegel’s implicit and explicit criticisms of Kant’s moral philosophy. See J. McCumber, *Understanding Hegel’s Mature Critique of Kant* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), pp. 148–149.

54 G. W. F. Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 289.

when Kantianism itself comes to be seen as an expression of the perversity that arises when duty is severed from desire. It will occur when he comes to recognize Kantian morality *as an internal, yet autocratic force*. Hegel is led to this break through his investigations into the historical unfolding of Christianity in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay, through his evaluation of this history *qua* his conception (faulty as it may be) of Greek *Volksreligion*, and, I would add, through his recognition of the *historicity* of politico-religious institutions themselves.

Inwardization and the Divided Self

Why, then, does the religious movement born, according to Hegel, of a confrontation with positivity in the name of morality come, as its influence spreads, to reproduce religious positivity? And why does this steer Hegel toward his eventual criticisms of Kantian morality? According to Hegel, this reversal occurs because Jesus is, in effect, condemned by his historical situation to challenge the positive religious tropes that undercut the free application of the moral law *by appealing to these very same tropes himself*. Jesus is condemned, for example, to ground the authority of his words on miracles because in order to be understood, he must speak in such a way as to accommodate the religious ideas and expectations of his time. Hegel writes of the contemporaries of Jesus, "they were most heartily convinced that they had received from God himself their entire polity and all their religious, political and civil laws. This was their pride; this faith cut short all speculations of their own; it was restricted solely to the study of the sacred sources and it confined virtue to blind obedience to these authoritarian commands."⁵⁵ Jesus is forced, then, to turn away from rational discourse alone as a means of persuasion and employ positive tropes because the people with whom he must communicate were so thoroughly immersed and

55 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 76.

shaped by religious positivity. At the same time, he must *avoid* the “pure” positive view that he alone has access to the will of God. “Pure” positivity would be reached only when human and divine natures are understood to be so completely severed that, in Hegel’s words, “no mediation between the two is conceded except in one isolated individual”. In this case, “all man’s consciousness of the good and the divine is degraded to the dull and deadly belief in a superior Being altogether alien to man”.⁵⁶

This has the general shape of a tragic double bind to the extent that Jesus finds himself trapped by his historical situation in a conflict between two “rights” or “duties”.⁵⁷ There is the obligation to convey the moral truth that Hegel finds at the heart of Jesus’s teaching, namely that the moral law is self-given and thus not dependent on an external, alien authority. There is also, however, the obligation to communicate this teaching, and this requires adopting the positive religious tropes of the times in which he lives. There is the obligation, in effect, to avoid the fate of the particular species of beautiful soul who remains “pure” by *not* acting, or in this case *not* speaking with reference to positive tropes.⁵⁸ The question that then arises is whether positive elements can both be deployed and, at the same time, contained. The substance of Hegel’s analyses of the historical unfolding of Christianity in “The Positivity” essay is that these concessions ultimately *do* undermine the moral impetus at the origin of Christianity, and so a second question poses itself, is this outcome *inevitable*? In “The Spirit of Christianity”, Hegel will argue for a kind of inevitability, and he will do so by way of the tragic poetic concepts of “fate” and “spirit”. The *spirit* of a people is both its defining principle *and* the manner in which this principle animates and shapes its doctrine, practices, and institutions. While the creation of, for example, the spirit of Christianity is a matter of choice,⁵⁹ once it has been established the contradictory aspects inherent

56 *Ibid.* p. 176, translations altered. See Wake, *Tragedy*, p. 76.

57 See Williams, *Tragedy*, pp. 125, 254.

58 See, for example, Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §668.

59 See Wake, *Tragedy*, p. 191. Also, Williams, *Tragedy*, p. 122.

in its self-conception play a role in determining its historical unfolding. It is *fated* in this sense.⁶⁰

While Hegel does make occasional use of the terms "spirit" and "fate" in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay, it is in a non-technical sense. Nevertheless, his analysis of the historical trajectory that Christianity follows seems to imply a degree of necessity. He describes the path to morality that passes through positivity, that is, the one that makes use of positive tropes, as a "circuitous route".⁶¹ We are meant to travel from miracles stories to faith, and from faith, "if all goes well", to morality.⁶² This route through positivity is also closely associated with the imagination. As Hegel writes, Jesus's dramatic life and unjust death "captivated the imagination" of the disciples.⁶³ (As such, it is associated with the second aspect of a *Volksreligion*.) The most significant danger of following this route is that it can undercut the very dignity of morality itself: as "self-sufficient and self-grounded", morality rejects external foundations, and Hegel argues that those who take this path to autonomy are so humbled by the journey that they deny to themselves the capacity for autonomous action.⁶⁴ They are rendered servile because of the way they have been trained to act from a hope for salvation, from a false reverence for Jesus based on his miraculous deeds, or, most likely, from the terror evoked by threats of punishment and damnation.

Despite the inherent interest of the question of whether the fall into positivity is inevitable, it is, in a way, mute, for the "circuitous route" has as an historical fact already been taken. Hegel cannot simply will away this history, but must, in effect, confront the question of whether we can engage positivity and a terrorized imagination in a way that does not further undermine our capacity for autonomous action. As Hegel continues to reconstruct the path that this route has forged, he finds that it eventually turns *inward*. Before it takes this turn, however, Hegel argues at

60 See, for example, Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate", p. 182.

61 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 79.

62 See Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 80.

63 *Ibid.* p. 78.

64 *Ibid.* p. 79.

some length that when the moral core of Christianity is contaminated by positivity, a significant symptom is a zeal for *expansion*. The contrast that Hegel makes is between Jesus as a moral teacher and the resurrected Jesus who commands of his disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be damned” (Mark 16. 15–16). For Hegel, in “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay the history of Christianity *is* the history of its expansion and we can see, retrospectively, that it follows a logic wherein the more it expands the more positive it becomes.⁶⁵ But what fuels this expansion? And beyond the explicit imperative to proselytize, why is this outward drive a symptom of positivity?

According to Hegel, when the positive elements of a religion overtake its moral essence and come to assume infinite worth an effect is that the faithful feel so united with this positive doctrine that any deviation from it becomes *almost* unimaginable. This marks the near extinction of the capacity for doubt. Thus, “a sort of surprise comes over a sectary if he hears of men who are not of his faith, and this feeling of uneasiness which they create in him is very readily transformed into dislike and then hatred.”⁶⁶ The drive to then *convert* these nonbelievers arises from the fact that the consciousness whose imagination has been assaulted to the point of being “faced”, as Hegel writes, “with the very terrors of hell”, will find consolation in the thought of others sharing in its fate: “the yoke of faith becomes more tolerable the more associates we have in bearing it, and when we attempt to make a proselyte, our secret reason is often our resentment that another should be free from chains which we carry ourselves and which we lack the strength to lose.”⁶⁷ This resentment indicates that a total commitment to our faith has faltered, however slightly, and doubt has resurfaced. We sense the truth that we are, to some degree, complicit in our own domination, but, as Hegel describes it, this is a fleeting recognition at best, and the effect tends *not* to be a sober acknowledgement of this truth, followed

65 See Wake, *Tragedy in Hegel's Early Theological Writings*, pp. 40–41.

66 Hegel, “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, p. 93.

67 *Ibid.* pp. 93–94. I examine Hegel's account of the consequences of this resentment in greater detail in Wake, *Tragedy*, pp. 65–66.

by a commitment to enlighten others through the slow process of public reasoning. It is, instead, to double down and attempt to entice others to join the fold, or to lash out at those who fail to conform. For Hegel, a symptom of this "secret reason" is the fact that with the *success* of Christianity's proselytizing mission "the zeal for conversion" diminishes.⁶⁸ It is when the resentful subject faces a world that reflects its own image that it turns back against itself. Christianity turns to *internal* enemies. Hegel writes, rather cryptically, that "the most dangerous enemies of Christianity are internal ones, and so much preparation and labour are needed in dealing with these that little thought can be given to the salvation of Turks or Samoyeds."⁶⁹ The internalized expansion of positivity ultimately takes the form of *asceticism*, and the new enemies are revealed to be the thoughts and feelings of the faithful themselves. Thus, the circuitous route follows a path from terror to anxiety.⁷⁰ If Christianity's outward expansionist drive is fuelled, in part, by the resentment arising from a terrorized imagination and the idea of a monarchical God,⁷¹ the *internalization* of this drive leads to the asceticism that produces the divided consciousness of the modern subject.

The asceticism of contemporary Christianity marks an expanded form of positivity when compared to that which Jesus faced in his own time, because the Christian Church does not simply command actions alone, but presumes to command *feelings* as well. The most intimate thoughts of the Christian, his very "disposition is prescribed for him in every detail."⁷² Hegel writes, "we are supposed to feel more grief at the death of our relatives than we ever really do, and the external signs of this feeling are governed not so much by what we really feel, as by what we are supposed to feel,

68 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 94.

69 *Ibid.* p. 95, translation altered.

70 Compare Rebecca Comay's analysis of the path from the terror of the French Revolution to the anxiety produced by the German moralist reaction to this terror. R. Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and French Revolution* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 90.

71 On the monarchical conception of God, see Williams, *Tragedy*, p. 261. Comay speaks of this inward migration establishing "a secret inner monarch". Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 97.

72 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 140.

and in this matter convention has even gone so far as to fix the feeling's strength and duration".⁷³ This internalization of the expansionist drive and the campaign it wages against "the enemy of piety which lurks in everyone's bosom"⁷⁴ constitutes Hegel's fuller explanation for the reduction of morality to an impossibly complex casuistic system of rules. For Hegel, by contrast, the very idea of a "commanded feeling" is contradictory because of the immediacy that he attributes to feelings; those who are subject to such an absurd imperative find that their "true and natural feelings"⁷⁵ are turned against themselves. The moral immediacy that posits direct access to our "natural" feelings is what Hegel attributes to Greek ethical life, and it is clear that Hegel understands that this has become disrupted by Christian asceticism. The effect of this disruption is no longer a form of positivity in which the law is given and authorized by an alien, *external* power. Asceticism of this kind is not the positivity that affirms a radical division between humanity and a transcendent, monarchical, law-giving God. The absolute nature of this divide remains, but now it resides within the subject itself. It takes the form of the divide between what we truly feel and the command that tells us what we are obligated to feel.

Hegel claims that a consequence of this divide is the self-deception wherein we convince ourselves that we really feel what we are commanded to feel. We identify with the command, and thus aspire to feel what we are told to feel. With this comes what he calls a "false tranquility".⁷⁶ Yet this false sense of comfort is tenuous, and the self-deception upon which it is based can be breached. When this occurs, however, the result is, again, *not* the first step in the slow process of enlightenment reform. When this false sense of ease is interrupted, the subject "sinks into helplessness, *Angst*, and self-distrust, a psychical state which often develops into madness".⁷⁷ One

73 *Ibid.* p. 139.

74 *Ibid.* p. 136.

75 *Ibid.* p. 140.

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.* p. 141.

type of "madness" that Hegel sees arising is the "species of gnawing worm"⁷⁸ known as a *bad conscience*. That is, one consequence of the recognition that our true feelings do not correspond to what we are commanded to feel is the self-laceration that occurs when, despite our best intentions, our feelings are always thought to fall short of the heights that are required of them. This is not just the self-punishment that arises when one has committed a brutal act and comes to acknowledge and regret it. This is rather the state of being always already guilty. While this certainly describes a particularly insidious psychological condition, what is of interest here is the conceptual configuration that gives rise to it, and the way in which, structurally, it reflects Kantian morality – at least as Hegel comes to understand it. A difference, of course, is that Kantianism commands the moral law and not particular feelings: (i) the moral law is not imposed by an external, alien force, but has been internalized and resides within us such that self-respect is acquired through following its command; (ii) the law – "use humanity ... always at the same time as an ends, never merely as a means"⁷⁹ – is nevertheless impossible for us to fulfil perfectly, for it calls us to bracket our inclinations, and in doing so commands us to act in a way that goes against our "nature"; (iii) striving in earnest to fulfil a moral law that we can never reach means that we are not guilty in this or that particular instance, but are guilty as such, and because we have internalized the law and come to identify with it, we condemn ourselves for this inevitable failure to fulfil it. This too is a recipe for an interminable bad conscience – as Nietzsche writes of Kant, "the categorical imperative smells of cruelty".⁸⁰ The unhappy consciousness arising from this "structural" bad conscience is a fragile one: "It takes only a slight increase in the intensity of the imagination to turn this condition too into madness and lunacy."⁸¹

78 F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 81.

79 Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 41.

80 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 65.

81 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 141.

Postmoralism

According to Hegel, then, resentment, *Angst*, and bad conscience are the products of asceticism, and his account of these shapes of consciousness brings us to the cusp of his break with Kant. The asceticism that Hegel criticizes so vehemently in “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” anticipates his later criticism of the rigoristic opposition of moral and non-moral motives in Kant’s practical philosophy.⁸² Further, the self-division and self-deception produced by this asceticism reflects, at a structural level, the diremption and dissemblance that he will come to diagnose in the Kantian moral subject in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” and subsequent works. This is captured succinctly in the following reference to Kant in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay:

between the Shaman of the Tungus, the European prelate who rules church and state, the Voguls, and the Puritans, on the one hand, and the man who listens to his own command of duty, on the other, the difference is not that the former make slaves of themselves, while the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves, while the latter carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave.⁸³

In “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay, as we have seen, the self-divided consciousness that Hegel diagnoses as a condition of modernity is a consequence of asceticism, and when he comes in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” to understand Kantianism as exemplary of this strain of modernity, he will transfer its perverse effects onto the Kantian moral world view as well.⁸⁴ “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay

82 See McCumber, *Understanding Hegel’s Mature Critique of Kant*, p. 149.

83 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 211. Hegel is referring to Kant, *Religion*, p. 164.

84 For example, in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, Hegel argues that the logic of the moral *ought* leads to the impossibility of fulfilling the moral project on its own terms. Thus, its fulfilment is endlessly postponed. See “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” essay, pp. 209–212. For a full account of Hegel’s position on this issue see Wake, *Tragedy*, pp. 139–146. On the *perversity* of the postponement inherent in Kantian morality, see Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, pp. 91, 98–101.

contains both a critique of Kant's moral philosophy, but also an anticipation of his mature *response* to it, a response that John McCumber notes is not so much a rejection of the moral worldview as its extension and fulfilment (according to the terms of Hegelian thought).⁸⁵ Hegel revisits the Sermon on the Mount, but now his conception of the *plērōma* of the law does not just affirm the moral law as law, but supersedes the very form of legalistic thought itself. This is achieved precisely by overcoming *through love* the Kantian opposition of duty and desire and its correlate reverence for the law: "This spirit of Jesus, a spirit raised above morality, is visible, directly attacking laws, in the Sermon on the Mount ... The Sermon does not teach reverence for the law but annuls it as law and so is something higher than obedience to law and makes law superfluous."⁸⁶ Doing the right thing for those we love does not require an appeal to duty. And this *plērōma* of the law means, for Hegel, arriving at notions of beauty and freedom that are conceived in a "postmoral" way. As such, Jesus heralds "something wholly foreign, a different genius, a different world", an "expression of life in its beautiful free region".⁸⁷

To conclude, this superseding of the moral law and the development of a postmoral philosophy is anticipated in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" essay in the way that Hegel's analysis of the self-division and self-enslavement of asceticism – when judged according to the Greek ideal of unification in division – reflects Hegel's critical account of the structure of the Kantian moral subject (as division without unification). It is also anticipated in his *de facto* acknowledgement that positivity and the imagination, as vital components in ethical life, cannot simply be supplanted and rendered superfluous by enlightened reason alone. Hegel may explicitly endorse the position that true religion is grounded in the commands of pure practical reason and the autonomy of the will, yet he is lead to the conclusion that enlightened reasoning on its own is incapable of breaking the spell of positivity and providing a remedy for the historical

85 McCumber, *Understanding Hegel's Mature Critique of Kant*, p. 6.

86 Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate", p. 212.

87 *Ibid.* p. 214.

reality produced by a terrorized imagination;⁸⁸ a remedy would require, instead, properly administering precisely what caused the damage in the first place – the imagination. Thus, for Hegel, the imagination becomes a *pharmakon*, as do the historically determined positive elements of religious life. They are both poison and cure.⁸⁹ What must then be determined is the appropriate dosage. Hegel considers the proper use of the imagination in a fragment entitled *Jedes Volk hat ihm eigene Gegenstände*, from the Bern period (mid-1796). He analyses the unity of the Greek *polis* in terms of the vitality of its shared imagery: all those in Athens, rich and poor, citizens and slaves, knew who Alcibiades, Agamemnon, and Oedipus were when “Sophocles or Euripides brought him out on stage.”⁹⁰ The Germans – “we who were never a nation”⁹¹ – are faulted precisely for this lack of a vital collective imagination – an imagination shaped in the case of the Greeks by tragedy. Insofar as Hegel is led in his account of the history of Christian positivity to the limits of Kantian Enlightenment thinking, there is a hint, to the extent that it is present in “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” at all, of a tragic sensibility. Conflict between reason and imagination, morality and positivity, duty and desire (and between right and right) is inescapable; genuine reconciliation is not the flight *from* the imagination, positivity, and desire *to* the purity of reason, morality, and duty, but arises from the recognition that conflict and reconciliation are inescapably intertwined. Or to put this another way, love as what fulfils the law is inseparable from the conflict that makes its presence necessary.⁹²

88 The recognition that we are culpable for our own submission to external authority elicits *resentment*, not enlightened self-understanding; the awareness of our false identification with what we are commanded to feel produces *Angst* and *bad conscience*, not greater rational self-determination.

89 See Wake, *Tragedy*, pp. 58, 73. Compare Hegel’s remark in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* manuscript that “knowledge heals the wound that it itself is”. Cited in Houlgate, “Religion, Morality, and Forgiveness”, p. 91.

90 Hegel, “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, p. 148.

91 *Ibid.* p. 146.

92 See Williams, *Tragedy*, pp. 118, 124 and Houlgate, “Religion, Morality, Forgiveness”, p. 93.

5 The Weakness of the Law: The Opposition of Concept and Life in Hegel's Early Ethics

In the Preface to his *Phenomenology*, Hegel introduces the polemical weapon with which he intends to destroy the romantic enthusiasm of his contemporaries in order to vindicate genuine *Wissenschaft*. That weapon, he knows, goes by an unassuming title, humbled by the grander sounding claims of “the Eternal, the Holy, [and] the Infinite”:¹ it is simply the *concept* (*der Begriff*). Despite its seeming banality, Hegel claims the concept has the merit of being the “sole element of [truth’s] existence”² and the “proper element” of science as well.³ However else the project of the *Phenomenology* may be conceived, it is from one side simply an attempt to justify the sober “labour” of conceptual thinking as against “the genius of profound original ideas and lofty flashes of inspiration.”⁴ From this work forward, moreover, the concept figures as an ever-present (if enigmatic) object of Hegel’s consideration. Hegel’s thinking is not only itself conceptually saturated, it is to a large extent devoted to thinking about the concept as such.⁵ It is thus noteworthy to discover among Hegel’s early writings a complete lapse in

1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 43 (HW 3: 65). With the exception of the texts from Nohl, Hegel's German (“HW”) is referenced to G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhaur and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).

2 *Ibid.* p. 4 (HW 3: 15); translation slightly modified.

3 *Ibid.* p. 44 (HW 3: 66).

4 *Ibid.* p. 43 (HW 3: 65).

5 Here I assume a greater connection between concepts in general and “the concept” (as often distinguished, however arbitrarily) than is common with other interpreters, though I cannot give a full defence of this position here. I will make a few remarks in this regard in the conclusion.

this devotion. While the mature Hegel is known for his understanding of the reconciliation of concept and being, thought and life, the young Hegel, particularly in his writings from Frankfurt (1797–1800), insists on the failure on the part of concepts to attain to the reality of “life” (“*Leben*”), a term of art from the period. Typical of his sentiment of the time, he writes, “when life [*das Lebendige*] is conceived in thought or given expression, it acquires a *form* alien to it, a conceptual form [*Form des Begriffs*], while on the other hand, the moral imperative is, as a universal, in *essence* a concept.”⁶ Here in evidence is the opposition of concept and life just mentioned but also a reference to the motivation of Hegel’s critique of concepts at the time: it is not primarily concepts in their theoretical role that Hegel derides, but concepts in their practical, and more precisely *legal*, role.

To adapt a phrase from St Paul, the concept itself is “the weakness of the law”, according to the young Hegel.⁷ Like Paul, Hegel wants to point out the basic incapacity of law to do what it purports; going beyond Paul, Hegel searches for the flaw in the form of legal thinking itself, which allows him to extend his critique of law even to the apparently autonomous morality of Kant. What Hegel draws attention to at this early stage is the way a concept, as something ideal and universal, is always opposed to the particular and real. Inspired by his friend Hölderlin, Hegel here espouses a philosophy of “unification” that derides any disparity between subject and object, ideal and real. If general concepts constitute the demands of morality, Hegel worries, morality will always be set against our living individuality, our inclinations, our unity with the whole. Hegel discovers that the same disparity between ideal and real that features in legal thinking condemns the Enlightenment morality of Kant as well. Because of its conceptual form, the morality of autonomy inherits the same problematic “curse” of the law. In place of a morality driven by universal and ideal conceptual norms, Hegel

6 G. W. F. Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) p. 213/267. Page numbers from the *Early Theological Writings* are followed by the correlated text in G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. H. Nohl (Tübingen: Mohr, 1907).

7 Cf. Romans 8: 13, and Galatians 3: 10–13 for the related notion of a “curse” of the law.

pursues an ethic “raised above morality”,⁸ an ethic that refuses to elevate norms over and against life.

From the perspective of Hegel’s development, his Frankfurt period, especially its culminating work, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, exhibits an episode of antipathy towards conceptual form that is unrepresentative in terms of his later work. While this is interesting at least as an anomaly in Hegel’s intellectual biography, the episode also helps clarify, by way of contrast, Hegel’s later attitude towards concepts. For it is not by ignoring but overcoming the weakness of conceptual form that Hegel comes to extol its significance for philosophical *Wissenschaft*, and for “ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*) in particular. Hegel’s change of attitude in this regard is already on display in his essay on “Natural Law” of 1802.⁹ It is here that he sees in the concept no longer a heteronomous power imposed on life, but a power of “absolute negativity”, the unity-in-difference at the heart of genuine science. Here we see Hegel as the emerging “anti-Romantic” that would be on display in the *Phenomenology*’s sardonic castigation of the merely inner and individual, of the ethic that would seek to evade the power of the concept. But Hegel did not attain this faith in the concept without first despairing of it; he was acquainted with the allure of the irrational before his fidelity to thought.

In the following essay, I wish to draw out the meaning and significance of Hegel’s early opposition to the concept in favour of “life”, in particular showing how Hegel’s anti-conceptualism serves his anti-juridical attitude in the “Spirit of Christianity” essay.¹⁰ This helps show how Hegel’s later reversal in his appreciation of concepts, which we will examine in his essay on *Naturrecht*, helps him overcome his opposition to legality as well, reconciling law and life in his developing concept of *Sittlichkeit*.

8 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 212/266.

9 G. W. F. Hegel, *Natural Law*, trans. T. M. Knox.

10 For an alternative account of Hegel’s early critique of law, see D. Loick, “Terribly Upright: The Young Hegel’s Critique of Juridicism”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* Vol. 40 No. 10 (2014), pp. 933–956. Loick’s attempt to enlist Hegel against the “pathologies of juridicism” can only be maintained, however, if one separates the early Hegel from his developing appreciation of law and institutional form.

“Positivity” and Conceptual Form

Hegel’s episodic turn against the concept would be motivated by his search for the weakness at the heart of law, which he believed to be present in both juridical and moral contexts. The conceptual form of law itself would show its fault whether the lawgiver was the autonomous subject or the authority of heteronomous, positive law. Clearly, in Hegel’s context, this suggests a direct challenge to the Kantian moral framework, which defines morality as such as an act of self-legislation. However, prior to his move to Frankfurt in 1797, Hegel had taken the Kantian notion of rational, moral autonomy as a key to developing his conception of an acceptable religion and community life.¹¹ Despite his eventual critique of Kantian ethics, Hegel conceived his project at the time, as he wrote in a letter to Schelling, as a way of applying (*anwenden*) [of] Kant’s project.¹² The connection between Hegel’s aspirations and Kant’s were nevertheless quite indirect. Hegel was bent on articulating an ideal of ethical community modelled on the Greek *polis*, where the individual was united with the whole, where individual feeling was united to the cult of “folk religion” (“*Volksreligion*”) in contrast to the fragmentation of individual and community endemic in modernity.¹³ The aesthetic and classicist flavours of Hegel’s ideal were not derived from Kant, but from Lessing, Schiller and Goethe.¹⁴ But Hegel gathered inspiration for his vision from the way Kant united the universal demands of reason to the individual’s practical judgement. Kant seemed to reveal a modern means of regaining the moral reconciliation of part and whole that was

11 Compare D. Moyer, “Rethinking Autonomy in Hegel’s Earliest Writings”, *The Owl of Minerva* Vol. 41 No. 1–2 (2010–2011), pp. 68–69.

12 G. W. F. Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel, Band I (1785–1812)*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), S. 16. Letter 8 January 1795.

13 See the so-called “The Tübingen Essay of 1793” for Hegel’s extended treatment of *Volksreligion*. In G. W. F. Hegel, *Three Essays*, ed. P. Fuss and J. Dobbins (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 30–58/3–29.

14 W. Kaufmann, “Hegel’s Early Antitheological Phase”, *The Philosophical Review* Vol. 63 No. 1 (1954), pp. 3–18.

felt to be evident in the Greek state.¹⁵ Yet this rational basis of community needed to be supplemented subjectively, by feeling and imagination, which were equally essential to a genuine *Volksreligion*.

In his years in Tübingen and Berne, Hegel's work focused on whether Christianity was capable of expressing the rational ideal he gathered from Kant, with the ethical and aesthetic unity he found in classical Greek religion. In general, Hegel sees historical Christianity as falling short of such a rational and aesthetically unified religion. Christianity was in general what he called a "positive" religion, not here in contrast to "negative" but to "natural",¹⁶ as in the distinction between positive and natural law. According to Hegel's position at the time, a religion is positive to the extent that its doctrines and morals are not prescribed through the autonomy of practical reason but through the enforcement of an external authority. At this stage, Hegel wants to show that the teachings of Jesus can be interpreted innocently of such positivity inasmuch as they prescribe morality alone as true religion, in line with Kant's arguments in his *Religion* essay.¹⁷ Hegel's account in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" (1795) then shows how historical Christianity converted the moral religion of Jesus into a positive one. That is to say that the precepts Jesus taught became accepted not because of their moral value but because it was Jesus who taught them,

15 See Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight, 1770–1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 233–234 for more on Hegel's attempt to reconcile his Kantian and Greek ideals.

16 Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", in *Early Theological Writings*, p. 167/139. See also H. B. Acton, "Introduction", in Hegel, *Natural Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), p. 15.

17 For example, "[Jesus] undertook to raise religion and virtue to morality and to restore to morality the freedom which is its essence." Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 69/154. The Kantian categorical imperative is even put on the lips of Hegel's Jesus in his *Das Leben Jesu* (1795): "To act only on principles that you can will to become universal laws among men, laws no less binding on you than on them" – this is the fundamental law of morality, the sum and substance of all moral legislation and the sacred books of all peoples. Enter the temple of virtue through this gate of righteousness. ... [M]orality alone is the criterion of what is pleasing to God." Hegel, *Three Essays*, pp. 115–116/87.

that is, by virtue of his authority.¹⁸ Eventually, this made Christianity amenable to the use of the authoritarian apparatus of the State to enforce its doctrines and morals. This downgrades Christianity to the “slavish obedience to laws” that Hegel attributes to Judaism.¹⁹ But this was possible, according to Hegel, only as a betrayal of the anti-positive morality of Jesus.

Hegel’s criticism of religious positivity has been detailed elsewhere²⁰ and is not here our main concern. What is significant for us is the way Hegel begins to articulate the problem of positivity philosophically, after having first shown it in its historical and theological “dress”. The philosophical critique of positivity can be seen in the last writings from Hegel’s stay in Berne and early pieces from Frankfurt. The philosophical basis of his early critique of positivity was derived from Kant’s notion of autonomy, but Hegel had so far practically assumed the correctness of Kant’s position. What was needed was a way of legitimately distinguishing moral from legal, and hence positive, demands. Kant himself justifies the difference in terms of the “determining ground” of the will:

It is now clear that those determining grounds of the will which alone make maxims properly moral and given them a moral worth – the immediate representation of the law and the objectively necessary observance of it as duty – must be represented as the proper incentives to action, since otherwise *legality* of actions would be produced but not *morality* of dispositions.²¹

That is, legality of action is possible through external conformity to an objective moral standard that does not derive from the pure subjective representation of duty as its determining ground. For Kant, the demands

18 Hegel, “Positivity”, pp. 72–73/155–156.

19 *Ibid.* pp. 68–69/153.

20 See G. Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics* (London: Merlin Press, 1975), Chapters 2, 5 and 6; Harris, *Hegel’s Development*, pp. 207–231. See J. Goldstein, *Hegel’s Idea of the Good Life* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), Chapter 1, for more on the *Volksreligion* ideal behind the critique.

21 I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 125 (Ak. 5: 151). Kant’s German is referenced to the *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1900–).

of morality are not heteronomous because they come from our own representation of the demand, rather than from, say, incentives of avoiding punishment.

This helps to show how a law could be “positive” or authoritarian in a way morality might not be. However, despite Hegel’s general appreciation for Kant’s morality, the basis of the Kantian position still depended on the strict separation of feeling and inclination from morality, which never suited Hegel’s own sensibility. Thus, Hegel begins to justify the distinction of morality and legality in his own way early on in his stay in Frankfurt, in a fragment from July 1797. He attempts to articulate the problem of positivity again, now with reference to the conceptual structure of practical reason.²² Though still rooted in his Kantianism, Hegel now makes use of a recognizably Fichtean notion of practical reason.²³ Fichte had emphasized the difference between theoretical and practical reason as a difference in the relation to an object posited outside the self. Theoretical reason was “objective” because of the resistance offered by its objects, while practical reason involved the pure subjective activity of the self in its “striving.”²⁴

22 The fragment is found in *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, SS. 374–375. It is discussed and partially translated in Harris, *Hegel’s Development*, p. 291. See T. L. Haering, *Hegel: Sein Wollen und sein Werk* Vol. 1 (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1929), SS. 334–361, for a complete commentary.

23 The only explicit reference to Fichte from this period in Nohl is on S. 361, from a Berne fragment. But Hegel was by now familiar with Fichte’s thought. Hölderlin encouraged Hegel to read Fichte’s *Grundlagen der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* and *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* in January 1795 (Hegel, *Briefe*, S. 20, Letter 9). In a letter to Schelling, commenting on Hölderlin’s enthusiasm for Fichte, Hegel shows that he has begun to read Fichte himself. He credits Fichte as among the “worthy successors” (*würdigen Nachfolgern*) of Kant, bearing the “fruit” of Kant’s work (*Briefe*, SS. 24–25, Letter 11). Haering shows that Hegel’s concept of the practical here is Fichtean (*Hegel*, SS. 345–346). Compare also Moyar, “Rethinking Autonomy”, p. 78.

24 “So far as the self posits limits, and itself within these limits, as we said above, its (positing) activity does not relate immediately to itself, but rather to a not-self that is to be opposed thereto (§ 2, 3). Hence it is no longer pure but *objective* activity (which posits an object for itself. The word *object* (*Gegenstand*) admirably designates what is meant for. ... If no rejection or resistance occurs, then there is simply no object of

Hegel uses this distinction to diagnose religious positivity: "A faith is called positive in which the practical is theoretically present – the originally subjective is only established as something objective ..." ²⁵ In brief, the positive in religion is a theoretical usurpation of the role of practical reason; it thus involves a confusion concerning the distinctive nature of practical concepts. Hegel explains a theoretical concept is constituted by having an object as something opposed to it, a non-I, which it attempts to subsume; the concept is supposed to establish a unity between subject and object that is not, *ex hypothesi*, originally present. Practical reason, however, is a pure activity, a unity without opposition: "Practical activity acts freely, without union of something opposed, without being determined by this – it does not bring unity in a given manifold, but rather is the unity itself ..." ²⁶ Accordingly, practical *concepts*, unlike theoretical ones, have no object to master, no manifold to subsume besides the activity of the acting I itself. ²⁷ The object that practical concepts *seem* to have is "a certain determination of the I ... determined in opposition to it, considered as an accident of the I ..." ²⁸ Such a concept is nevertheless merely the "reflected activity" of the I. The opposition suggested by such a concept is an illusion of the reflection itself; the unity in the practical concept is primary.

Positivity, as Hegel now argues, results when the object of a practical concept, which is really the acting I itself, is taken to be an object outside the I, cognized quasi-theoretically as "something given, something objective [which] maintains its power, its force, its effectiveness only through an object awakening reverence or fear, before which we decay and must be

the activity, and no objective activity; on the contrary, the activity, if it is indeed to be such is pure, and reverts into itself. ...)." J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, with the First and Second Introductions, ed. P. Heath and J. Lachs (New York: Meredith Co., 1970), p. 227 (Part III, § 5).

25 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 374.

26 *Ibid.*

27 According to Fichte, it is in practical reason that "all reality" is shown to conform to the self: "This demand, that everything should conform to the self, that all reality should be posited absolutely through the self, is the demand of what is called – and with justice – practical reason." Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 232 (Part III, § 5).

28 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 374.

subjected ...”²⁹ The moral law, for example, becomes positive in this manner when it is not represented as derived and legitimated from autonomous reason itself but thanks to an historical accident, perhaps imagined as the effect of a kind of miracle like the revelation at Sinai.³⁰ Our inability to cognize the cause of this revelation, if interpreted theoretically, leads us to suppose an objectivity “that cannot be comprehended [*begriffen*] by us.”³¹ Legal authority is subsequently required to create a “false synthesis”³² between this object and ourselves as its subjects. Yet this is not due to the real transcendence of the apparent object and acting subjects, but by our failure to recognize the activity of our own selves.

The moral law, then, interpreted in Kantian and Fichtean terms, is here what can save religion from authoritarian positivity, for moral concepts are expressions of unified self-activity. There are thus reasons pertaining to *conceptual form* for making the distinction between moral and positive laws that Hegel had used in his early writings. Legality, especially in religion, is simply morality turned positive, imperative form represented as a transcendent object in opposition to the activity of the self. It is thus capable of being turned on the subject or on a community with commanding authority. But *moral law* is innocent of such positivity for Hegel at this stage; it is only thanks to the autonomy of the moral law that a sphere of life can be carved out in freedom from positivity. The practical concepts responsible for moral law are the product of living activity. As Haering writes, commenting on this period, “Thereby for [Hegel] the practical concept is in fact not only ‘living’, or the concept simply adapted to the living unities of life, but at the same time that to which the practical region, according to

29 *Ibid.* S. 375.

30 “The infinite object, its courses of action are also for the faculty of cognition positive; miracles, revelations, appearances.” *Ibid.* p. 375. The giving of the “Israelite law” is discussed in the previous fragment, *ibid.* pp. 373–374. See Hegel’s later telling of Moses’s reception of the law in “Spirit of Christianity”: “The principle of the entire legislation was the spirit inherited from [Moses’s] forefathers, i.e., was the infinite Object ...” Hegel, “Spirit of Christianity”, p. 191/250.

31 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, S. 375.

32 This is Lukács’s apt summation of positivity. Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, p. 154.

the meaning of its own kind of actuality, is particularity suited.”³³ Thus, as Hegel initially articulates the philosophical critique of positivity, the concepts of practical reason stand in his service; they are not yet “the weakness of the law” but the expression of autonomy.

Hölderlin’s Opposition to the Concept

So far, Hegel’s opposition to legality is limited solely to *positive* law, and here the critique is held off from the law-like principles of morality, which are supposed to constitute the content of religion. Thus he sees the need to preserve a *right* for the moral law: “The right to legislate for one’s self, to be responsible to one’s self alone for administering one’s own law, is one which no man may renounce, for that would cease to be a man altogether.”³⁴ Positivity is the usurpation of the right of self-legislation, while self-legislation constitutes the essence of morality. Later on in Frankfurt, however, Hegel endeavours a much more radical critique of law than the Kantian tradition provided him. Rather than simply putting positive law in its place, outside of morality and rational religion, Hegel now turns against the very form of law implied in the dictates of morality. Now it is not just the law that can be enforced by external authority, but even the *nomos* of rational autonomy that falls under censure. What led Hegel to such a radicalization?

It is now established that the key philosophical influence on Hegel during his stay in Frankfurt was his friend Hölderlin, whose significance as a philosopher as well as a poet has been increasingly recognized.³⁵ According

33 Haering, *Hegel*, S. 348. Author’s translation.

34 Hegel, “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, p. 145/212.

35 Henrich, for example, gives Hölderlin a priority apart from his more “philosophical” friends in developing a first step in the development of German Idealism outside of the Kantian foundations of the ego: “... it was Hölderlin who, in light of Kant’s theory of freedom, first challenged Kant’s thesis that the unity of consciousness of the I as the subject of thought makes the highest point from which philosophy must

to Terry Pinkard, Hegel's time with Hölderlin in Frankfurt would be the most significant intellectual friendship of his life.³⁶ Dieter Henrich emphasizes that it was under Hölderlin's influence that Hegel came to turn away from his own Kantianism, which he then came to see as incapable of attaining to the Greek ideal of unity that had been his more fundamental concern all along.³⁷ We have already seen how, early on in Frankfurt, Hegel begins to turn from his Kantian vocabulary towards a more Fichtean one that had also been adopted by Schelling and Hölderlin. Moreover, Hegel begins to assimilate Hölderlin's romantic tone³⁸ and finds in his thinking a new expression of his aspiration, which in turn provides him with a new critical resource as he returns to his ethical and religious occupations.

The key to Hölderlin's philosophical vision of the time, and thus his influence on Hegel, was his conception of the metaphysical priority of unity. He was a proponent of what Henrich calls "unification philosophy" (*Vereinigungsphilosophie*).³⁹ Besides its connection to the revival of Spinozism in Germany, the motivation for "unification" comes in as a response to the ostensibly absolute separation of subject and the unknowable object in Kant's philosophy. Whereas the presupposition of such separation appeared to have priority in Kant, Hölderlin supposed (with Fichte) that it is only as a severance of an original unity that the subject-object

proceed." D. Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 121.

36 T. Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 80.

37 Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance*, p. 129.

38 No technical sense of "romantic" is meant here, only a rough indication of thematic sensibility (i.e. unification with nature, intuitive rather than discursive thinking, the priority of art, etc.). Pinkard cites Hegel's poem "Eleusis", written for Hölderlin, as evidence that Hegel "had half-heartedly tried to become a Romantic of sorts". Pinkard, *Hegel*, p. 77. See F. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism 1781–1801* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 349–355, for more on the thin line between Romantics and idealists in this era. Kaufmann and Lukács argue against Dilthey's interpretation of the young Hegel as a Romantic. See Kaufmann, "Hegel's Early Antitheological Phase", pp. 9–15; Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, pp. xvii–xx, 110–111.

39 Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance*, pp. 121–122.

distinction is possible in the first place. But whereas Fichte posits the original unity entirely on the side of the subject, Hölderlin seeks an overreaching unity beyond the subjective “I”.⁴⁰ It was as an expression of this original unity that Hölderlin adopted the term “being” (“*Seyn*”) in his philosophy. As he writes on the flyleaf fragment “Über Urtheil und Seyn”, he means by *Seyn*, “where subject and object are absolutely, not just partially united [*vereinig[e]t*], and hence united so that no ? division can be undertaken, without destroying the essence [*Wesen*] of the thing that obviously does not obtain through an artificial connection, but is more original than any relating ...”.⁴¹ As the primordial unity, *Seyn* was then used to convict whatever could sever such unity. The opposite side of the fragment lays blame on the act of judgement (*Urtheil*): “Judgement: is in the highest and strictest sense the original sundering of Subject and Object most intimately united in intellectual intuition ... the *Ur-Theilung* [‘original division’].”⁴² So far, this is in keeping with Fichte’s treatment of theoretical reason that posits an object outside of itself. Yet unlike the fragment we discussed above, Hölderlin does not spare the practical judgement from this critique: “... in practical *Urtheilung*, it [the ego] posits itself as opposed to the *Non-ego*, not to itself.”⁴³ In other words, for Hölderlin there is an underlying ground⁴⁴ of both knowledge and practical activity that exists in the unity of subject and object; as soon as something – say, a duty or aim – becomes an *object* of practical judgement, this unity has already been destroyed.

40 Beiser, *German Idealism*, pp. 386–391.

41 Quoted and translated in Harris, *Hegel’s Development*, p. 515.

42 *Ibid.* p. 516.

43 *Ibid.* Hölderlin conceived intellectual intuition as a theoretical rather than practical faculty. As he writes in a letter to Friedrich Niethammer in February 1796, “... I want to find the principle that will explain to my satisfaction the divisions in which we think and exist ... theoretically, through intellectual intuition, without practical reason having to intervene.” F. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, ed. and trans. C. Louth and J. Adler (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 68. Letter 34.

44 Henrich suggests that in this Hölderlin is still remaining true to the Kantian (rather than Fichtean) notion of an “unknowable ground of knowledge”. Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance*, pp. 86–87.

It is no surprise, then, given that judgements are seen as a synthesis of concepts, that Hölderlin takes aim at concepts themselves. Though the primary material available on this subject is inadequate to reconstruct Hölderlin's view in detail, we do have evidence of his view of concepts from the period in a letter to his half-brother Karl Gok. There Hölderlin speaks of the way principles of reason are all "related to the *general* conflict in the human being, that is, to the *conflict between the striving for the absolute and the striving for the limitation*."⁴⁵ The principles of reason, however, demand that this opposition be unified. Accordingly, "every unifying [*Vereinigung*] of the conflict must produce a result, and these results of the general unifying of the conflict are then the general concepts of the understanding, e.g. the concepts of substance and accident, of action and reaction, duty and right etc."⁴⁶ Thus, Hölderlin sees general concepts as resulting from unifications made necessary because of drives conflicted between limitation and the absolute. Like the judgement itself, then, a concept is the site of a unification, but it is a derivative unification, one which, moreover, pastes together pieces already torn asunder. The concept is a symptom of prior disunity rather than a sign of *Ur-Einheit*.

Hölderlin's nostalgia for a unity uncorrupted by conscious knowledge,⁴⁷ however it may strike the contemporary reader, undoubtedly captivated the imagination of Hegel. For Hölderlin seemed to give a metaphysical picture to suit the dream of ethical unity that so inspired Hegel. Moreover, given that this ideal of unity was believed to be *actual* in the experience of intellectual intuition – the "epistemological" correlate of *Seyn*, for Hölderlin – it seemed possible to hold up this absolute unity as a genuine touchstone. Accordingly, Hölderlin's concept of being shows up in one of Hegel's sketches

45 Letter to Karl Gok, 2 June 1796. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, p. 70. Letter 36.

46 *Ibid.* Compare Fichte's remark that "all synthetic concepts arise through a unification of opposites". Fichte, *Science of Knowledge* p. 120 (Part II, § 4).

47 Compare Hyperion's lament at the beginning of Hölderlin's novel: "O! Had I never gone to your [i.e. Germany's] schools! The knowledge which I pursued down its tunnels and galleries, from which, in my youthful folly, I expected confirmation of all my pure joy – that knowledge has corrupted everything for me." F. Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed. E. L. Santner (New York: Continuum, 1990), p. 4.

from 1798, as he again attempts to define the concept of positivity, here with the first notice of an opposition to Kant as well.⁴⁸ Likewise, in the piece that will presently occupy us, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, Hegel re-introduces Hölderlin’s concept of being along with the parallel notion of life (*Leben*)⁴⁹ to redirect his critique of law towards the very heart of (Kantian) morality as well.

“The Law, Weakened by the Concept ...”

Hegel’s essay has as its ostensible aim an account of Jesus’s life and teachings, which he suspends thematically between the ill-fated tragedy of Judaism and the Christian comedy of errors. The key to Hegel’s understanding of Jesus lies in his interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount in terms of a Hölderlin-style unification philosophy. It is in attempting to account for Jesus’s claim to fulfil but not abolish the Mosaic law that Hegel introduces his new critique of the concept as an interpretive key. In Hegel’s view, then, the conceptual form of law inherits the Christian critique of the Judaic law.⁵⁰ Just as St Paul can be seen to give a theological foundation for Jesus’s critique of law with his notion of the “flesh” (*sarx*), Hegel gives a “romantic” foundation for the critique of the law in the repudiation of the abstract universality of the concept.

The target of Hegel’s critique at this stage is simply the way a concept emblemizes the opposition between universal and particular, ideality and

48 See Harris, *Hegel’s Development*, pp. 512–515, for the translation. The sketch is in *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, SS. 382–385.

49 These concepts seem to function as near equivalents for Hegel at this stage: “Pure life is *being*,” Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 254/303. See W. Dilthey, *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. IV (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1990), SS. 59–60, for the connection of *Leben* to Schelling’s philosophy.

50 As Loick puts it, “Hegel construes Judaism so as to especially exemplify the flaws he chalks up to Kant and Fichte and reaches for prevailing prejudices in order to lend his criticisms a peculiar luridness.” Loick, “Terribly Upright”, p. 936.

reality. It is this opposition that attains practical actuality in law: "Since laws are unifications of opposites in a *concept*, which thus leaves them as opposites while it exists itself in opposition to *reality*, it follows that the concept expresses an *ought*."⁵¹ Here we are reminded of Hegel's earlier criticism of theoretical concepts, which had espoused that such concepts are likewise unifications of opposites, viz. the I and the non-I. Practical concepts had been spared from being considered in this way, but here, Hegel understands the conceptual "ought" of the law to set the individual in contradiction with a universal standard outside of him: "For the particular – impulses, inclinations, pathological law, sensuous experience, or whatever else it is called – the universal is necessarily always something alien and objective."⁵² In the law, the duty, as something universal, is supposed to stand in *contradiction* to the individual as embodied by the person. And it is conceptual form that gives the law such universality.

This appears to be what Hegel means by saying that laws are "unification of opposites in a *concept*."⁵³ The conceptual form of law, its universality and ideality, establishes an inner contradiction between two poles. Civil laws put this opposition on display in that they require the force of an "external power" (e.g. sovereignty) to create unity between the law and several individuals. Moral laws, on the contrary, contain an opposition between the self and his duty, but they cannot be externally enforced, since the cleavage is internal to the individual. Kant, as we saw, had made the

51 Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate", p. 209/264.

52 *Ibid.* p. 211/266.

53 Here I differ from Bernstein, who interprets the "unification of opposites" as the opposition between an action and its prohibition: "By saying a law involves a unification of opposites, he means that it brings together an action and its prohibition (or the negation of its prohibition): of the act of killing, do not do it; of making a promise, do not break it. Since a law just is this unifying of opposites, the killing and the not doing it, then it must leave its elements as opposites." J. M. Bernstein, "Love and Law: Hegel's Critique of Morality", *Social Research* Vol. 70 No. 2 (2003), p. 408. Bernstein's interpretation, however, does not take into account how the law inherits the same kind of oppositions as concepts in general.

distinction between the moral and the properly legal along similar lines.⁵⁴ Hegel acknowledges that we might accordingly expect the critique of law in the Sermon on the Mount to be limited to civil law, perhaps that the moral law “loses its objectivity, its positivity, its heteronomy, and the thing commanded is revealed as grounded in an autonomy of the human will.”⁵⁵ This would preserve the Kantian distinction as given. However, Hegel no longer acknowledges the difference between civil and moral law as essential in this regard, for “the man who listens to his own command of duty ... carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave.”⁵⁶ In the obedience to duty, even in the morality of autonomy, “[t]here remains a residuum of indestructible positivity ...”⁵⁷ The extension of Hegel’s critique of the positivity of civil and religious law to the positivity even of the autonomous moral law could only have been possible by generalizing the basis of the former critique. Moral laws are guilty of the same offence of “fixing oppositions” that is made possible by conceptual form.⁵⁸

Compared to Hegel’s early Kantianism, it is remarkable to observe the severity of his repudiation of concept and duty at once. As suggested, the impulse towards the critique could only come from the metaphysical criterion of unified being that Hegel adopted from Hölderlin, as begins to become clear as he continues:

54 See the passage from the second *Critique* quoted above. Elsewhere, in a context similar to Hegel’s, Kant takes issue with what he sees as the Jewish use of the “good principle” of morality in the service of civil society (based on Kant’s Protestant reading of the Hebrew Scriptures): “The good principle did indeed, because of its legal claim to dominion over the human being, safeguard itself through the establishment of the form of a government that was arranged (in *Jewish* theocracy) merely to serve for public and exclusive veneration of its nature. ... But, in turn, they were capable of no other laws than partly such as imposed burdensome ceremonies and customs, and partly such as were indeed moral but in which an external coercion occurred and which were, therefore, only civil laws, the inside of the moral attitude not being considered at all.” I. Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. W. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2009), p. 89 (Ak. 6: 69).

55 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 211/266.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.* p. 210/264–265.

Since the commands of duty presuppose a cleavage [between reason and inclination] and since the domination of the concept declares itself in an “ought” [*Sollen*], that which is raised above this cleavage is by contrast an “is” [*Sein*], a modification of life ...⁵⁹

Concepts sever us from life, Hegel tells us, by promoting an “ought” in distinction from “is”, from *being*. Thus, any morality that takes imperative form is *eo ipso* “alien” to life: “... when life is conceived in thought or given expression, it acquires a *form* alien to it, a conceptual form, while, on the other hand, the moral imperative is, as a universal, in *essence* a concept.”⁶⁰ For Hegel this means, for example, that if the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are to be authentic, they cannot be taken as moral imperatives at all.⁶¹ A morality based on imperatives is derived from concepts set in opposition to the form of life.

Hegel’s critique of morality becomes more delicate when he tries to articulate how an ethics of *virtue* does not fail in the same way as the moral imperative, and moreover is responsible for “fulfilling” the requirements of law without acknowledging the authority of law. Virtue promises to provide the basis of a non-conceptual ethic. A virtue, Hegel explains, is “correspondence of inclination with law”, but not in such a way that the law enforces or masters inclination, but rather “such that law and inclination are no longer different.”⁶² Accordingly, virtue is an expression of “life.”⁶³ Hegel puts forward “life” as a complimentary expression for the unity of being⁶⁴ and virtue as its ethical correlate. Like life itself, virtue does not presuppose an opposition between norm and inclination but

59 *Ibid.* p. 212/266. Translation slightly modified.

60 *Ibid.* p. 213/267.

61 As he writes later on in the essay, “Only in name or as a word, can [love] be commanded; it is only possible to *say*: Thou shalt love. Love itself pronounces no imperative. It is no universal opposed to a particular, no unity of the concept ...” *Ibid.* p. 247/296.

62 *Ibid.* p. 214/268.

63 “... this correspondence of law and inclination is life ...” *Ibid.* p. 215/268.

64 Hölderlin’s influence is clear when Hegel speaks in this context of being (and by implication, life) as “the synthesis of subject and object, in which subject and object have lost their opposition.” *Ibid.* p. 214/268.

simply “modifies” life. It is thus not that life is antagonistic to the dictates of law, but rather, because life (in the form of virtue) satisfies law without subservience to duty, it makes law superfluous. Most significantly, life for Hegel is not realized by the mediation of a conceptual norm.

“*Leben*”, then, even if a vitalist abstraction,⁶⁵ becomes the motivating basis for an ethics of virtue. Virtue makes an advance on duty by achieving similar ends without introducing abstract universality and possibility. Hegel gives as an example the way a virtue obviates law with what he calls “reconcilability” (“*Versöhnlichkeit*”)⁶⁶ in the context of Jesus’s discussion of the prohibition of murder:

In reconcilability the law loses its form, *the concept is displaced by life*; but what reconcilability thereby loses in respect of the universality which grips all particulars together in the concept is only a seeming loss and a genuine infinite gain on account of the wealth of living relations with individuals (perhaps few) with whom it comes into connection. It excludes not reality but only thoughts and possibility, while the form of the command and *this wealth of possibility in the universality of the concept is itself a rending [Zerreißung] of life ...*⁶⁷

The prohibition of murder, for Hegel, covers the whole range of particular cases only in “thoughts and possibility,”⁶⁸ namely, thanks to the concept. The virtue of reconcilability, by contrast, enters only into the living relations between persons, and requires nothing beyond such immediacy. Despite the partial coincidence of behaviour between the *versöhnlich* person and

65 “Vitalism” is Beiser’s term to characterize one aspect of *Frühromantik* sensibility, which seems pertinent to the young Hegel as well. See Beiser, *German Idealism*, pp. 353–353, 365–368, 659 n. 14.

66 The term is derived from the Luther Bible: “Darum, wenn du deine Gabe auf dem Altar opferst und wirst allda eingedenk, daß dein Bruder etwas wider dich habe, so laß allda vor dem Altar deine Gabe und gehe zuvor hin und *versöhne dich mit deinem Bruder*, und alsdann komm und opfere deine Gabe.” Matt. 5: 23–24. Emphasis added.

67 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, pp. 215–216/269; emphasis added.

68 Compare the repudiation of possibility with Hölderlin’s sketch: “There is for us no thinkable possibility, which was not an actuality. For this reason the concept of possibility has absolutely no valid application to the objects of Reason ... The concept of possibility has valid application to objects of the understanding, that of actuality to the objects of perception and intuition.” Quoted in Harris, *Hegel’s Development*, p. 516.

the non-murderer, the difference is essential. The one who obeys the moral command *as a concept* has in fact severed himself from life. Virtue, however, in its displacement of the moral imperative, displaces the concept as well.

Throughout the essay, Hegel will continue to demonstrate the weakness of law thanks to its conceptual form. Of particular interest is his discussion of the role of the concept in punishment and criminal law. While in the sphere of virtue, life stood in contrast to the *form* of law, but not its content, in the case of criminal punishment the concept cancels the very content of life, for the law in punishment (often quite literally) “signals the destruction of life.”⁶⁹ As a result, punishment cannot bring about genuine reconciliation in the life of the criminal; it forges a solution on the level of the concept at the expense of reality:

I mean that, since laws are purely conceptual unifications of opposites, these concepts are far from exhausting the many-sidedness of life. Punishment exercises its domination only in so far as there is a consciousness of life at the point where a disunion has been reunified *conceptually*; but over the relations of life which have not been dissolved, over the sides of life which are given as *vitally* united [*lebendig vereinigt*], over the domains of the virtues, it exercises no power.⁷⁰

The concept, in law, is both powerless over life, but also a power against life, it enters the sphere of life only as death: the formal universality of the command leads to the loss of life in the case of its transgression.⁷¹ Indeed, a Pauline gloss might suggest that “all who rely on the concept are under a curse ...”

In additional writings from the period, Hegel uses the same vitalist criterion to reformulate his critique of theoretical in addition to practical

69 Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 225/277. Translation slightly modified.

70 *Ibid.* p. 233/283.

71 For example, “The trespasser has put himself outside the concept which is the content of the law. The law merely says that he must lose the rights comprised in the law; but, because the law is directly only a thought, it is only the concept of the trespasser which loses the right; and in order that this loss may be actualized; i.e., in order that the trespasser may really lose what his concept has lost, the law must be linked with life and clothed with might. ... The law cannot forgo the punishment, cannot be merciful, or it would cancel itself.” *Ibid.* p. 225/277.

and legal concepts. In working out a new preface to his “Positivity” essay (1800), Hegel now suggests that the notion of a rational or natural religion is as problematic as that of a positive religion, for every concept of a rational religion will have to work with a universal and necessary *concept* of human nature. But Hegel now suggests that this approach is contrary to the purpose of understanding religion and humanity as they actually are:

But the *living nature of man is always other than the concept of the same*, and hence what for the concept is a bare modification, a pure accident, a superfluity, becomes a necessity, something living, perhaps the only thing which is natural and beautiful. ... [H]uman manners and characteristics together with the accompanying religion cannot be determined by concepts at all.⁷²

While Hegel had criticized the theoretical use of concepts before, simply because it implies the separation of the subject and object of knowledge, here the notion of *Leben* serves this purpose. The medium of the concept simply cannot apprehend the matter of life, which is purely “accidental” and unpredictable, in contrast to the cold necessity and universality favoured by conceptual thinking. In contrast to abstract, universal “nature”, *life* cannot be conceptually expressed.⁷³

Concept and Negativity in *Naturrecht*

Hegel’s critique of the concept in Frankfurt was motivated by a certain understanding of the unity of *Seyn* as absolute, such that any crack in its undivided surface, any *Trennung* or separation, would abolish its right to absoluteness. The moral law, and therewith the ethical concept, was

72 Hegel, revised introduction to “Positivity”, p. 169/141. Emphasis added. This passage is discussed in detail by Goldstein, *Hegel’s Idea*, pp. 112–117.

73 Note, by contrast, Hegel’s later remark in the *Phenomenology*, p. 6: “The power of Spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition.”

perceived to represent just such a fissure, dividing the subject from himself through the intermediacy of a universal duty. Through its presence in the moral law, the concept was seen to be a source of *positivity*, that is, of nomic authority that would be absent in the kind of aesthetic religion that Hegel attempts to articulate.

Much would have to change in Hegel's appreciation of the concept before he could speak the *Phenomenology* of the concept as that "misunderstood ecstasy" that is in fact "the sole element of [truth's] existence."⁷⁴ Here I wish to show briefly how the seeds of Hegel's conceptualist conversion can be seen in his essay from 1802, "The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law" (hereafter, *Naturrecht*), published in the journal he edited with Schelling. Hegel introduces here the theme of *negativity* that dominates his later thought, and he interprets conceptuality in terms of that theme: the positivity of the concept in the sense above is taken equally to be a negativity. The intent is not paradoxical: recall that the positive was introduced in contrast to the natural, and it signifies the "false synthesis" of law over its subjects. Thus, what gives law its positive fixity and authority is its *negative* relationship to subjects. As he writes at the end of the essay, "what we have so far called positive has in the event turned out to be the negative considered in itself ..." ⁷⁵ So this is not yet a case of reversal, but a kind of equivalence.

Accordingly, the negativity of the concept, and thus the formal universality of law, is criticized for the same reason as the positivity of legal duty. In this case, too, it is Kantian and Fichtean ethics condemned for their pure conceptuality. In contrast to empirical methods for establishing the science of law (which are criticized in their turn), Hegel takes Kant and Fichte to task as "formalists", who uphold purely unified rational principles of duty over and against the multiplicity of sensible experience.⁷⁶ According

74 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, p. 44 (HW 3: 66), 4 (HW 3: 15); translation slightly modified.

75 Hegel, *Natural Law*, p. 133 (HW 2: 530).

76 Hegel seems to maintain roughly the same criticism in his *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox and S. Houlgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), §§ 134–139 and remarks.

to Hegel's characterization, "formalism asserts its formal principles as *a priori* and absolute, and thus asserts that what it cannot master by these is non-absolute and accidental ..." ⁷⁷ Here again, it is the pure ideality of *conceptual form* that is codified in law:

The absolute law of practical reason is to elevate that specification [of the will] into the form of pure unity, and the expression of this specification taken up into this form is the law. If the specification can be taken up *into the form of the pure concept*, if it is not cancelled thereby, then it is justified and has itself become absolute through negative absoluteness as law and right or duty. ⁷⁸

Hegel retains the view that a Kantian ethic poses a contradiction due to the universality of its form in contrast to the specificity of the content demanded by the action. The formalist method posits the "absolute concept" as a *negative absolute* since it exists solely in its opposition to the empirical subject. ⁷⁹

Thus to speak of the concept as "negative" so far implies nothing better than "positive" did in Frankfurt. However, the innovation of Hegel's thinking in Jena lies in his refusal to give such a one-sided account, in favour of a systematic view that takes in the whole. The negative relation of concept to life, of universal form to individual matter, is one of many systematic relations that must be held in tension if there is to be a science of law. In particular, the antagonism on the side of the absolute and "ideal" concept is met by an antagonism on the side of the "real" individual, who just as falsely asserts a negative counter-absolute, as in liberal social contract theories of the State. ⁸⁰ Rather than demanding that one side of the antagonism cede to the other, Hegel now suggests that an ethical whole contains both the moment of the universal's privilege, in the *law*, and the moment of the individual's living virtues, in *morality*. Hegel calls the systematic unity of such ethical relations

77 Hegel, *Natural Law*, p. 62 (HW 2: 443).

78 *Ibid.* p. 75 (HW 2: 460). Emphasis added.

79 "... the false attempt to exhibit a true absolute in the negative absolute." *Ibid.* (HW 2: 459).

80 See *ibid.* pp. 90–91 (HW 2: 477–480).

Sittlichkeit, “ethical life.”⁸¹ This whole is an absolute not by being an undifferentiated unity, but by preserving unity in its differentiating negativity:

Since real absolute ethical life, united in itself, comprehends infinity (or the absolute concept), pure individuality *sans phrase* and in its supreme abstraction, it is directly the ethical life of an individual. Conversely, the essence of the ethical life of the individual is *the* real and therefore universal absolute ethical life; the ethical life of the individual is one pulse beat of the whole system and is itself the whole system.⁸²

This kind of systematic holism is of course not surprising to find in Hegel, as it stands in continuity with his presentation in the *Philosophy of Right*.⁸³ However, from the side of Hegel’s early thought, this is a remarkable development. The inclusion of “the absolute concept” within the “ethical life of an individual” would not have been possible in his early opposition of life and concept. All the more remarkable is that Hegel does not gain conceptuality in *Sittlichkeit* by denying the kind of opposition he had earlier noticed, but by realizing the way that life or “reality” is itself posited through the negation of the concept:

... for precisely because the absolute concept is its own opposite, the being of difference is posited along with its pure unity and negativity. In other words, the canceling posits something that it cancels, the real; and so there would be an actuality and difference which ethical life cannot surmount.⁸⁴

81 The place of *Sittlichkeit* within the *Naturrecht* essay is given a fuller exposition by L. Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit 1770–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 205–230.

82 Hegel, *Natural Law*, p. 112 (HW 2: 504).

83 See, for example, Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, pp. 265–266 (§ 278, Remark): “The *idealism* which constitutes sovereignty is the same as that in accordance with which the so-called ‘parts’ of an animal organism are not parts but members, moments in an organic whole, whose isolation and independence spell disease. There principle here is the same as that which came before us ... in the abstract concept of the will as self-relating negativity, and therefore as universality *determining itself to individuality* and so superseding all particularity and determinacy ... To understand this, one must have mastered the whole concept of substance and of the genuine subjectivity of the concept.”

84 Hegel, *Natural Law*, p. 99 (HW 2: 488).

In other words, the negativity of the concept necessarily affirms the reality of what it negates; this establishes a relation from the side of the individual (the real) that will constitute the side of morality in ethical life. In realizing that this side of the relation is posited just as negatively⁸⁵ vis-à-vis the concept, however, Hegel overcomes the romantic privilege of the immediate and sensuous; he comes to affirm the legal and institutional in their own "right".⁸⁶ Moreover, the ethical task of the individual is now conceived as overcoming the opposition of her negative relation to the universal in education, the reunification of the individual with the universal: "The living being under this form of the negative is the budding [*Werden*] of ethical life, and education [*Erziehung*] is by definition the emerging progressive cancellation [*Aufheben*] of the negative or subjective ..."⁸⁷

The use of organic language in such passages shows how Hegel has reconceived life from being a pure, inexpressible unity to a unity that contains the negative moment of the concept within it.⁸⁸ He continues: "Thus the absolutely ethical has its own proper organic body [*organischen Lieb*] in individuals, and its movement and vitality in the common being and doing of everyone is absolutely identical as both universal and particular."⁸⁹ Hegel will in fact interpret the positive (and thus *merely* negative) as the part of the law that does not reconcile individual and universal, and thus stands

85 *Ibid.* p. 113 (HW 2: 506).

86 *Ibid.* pp. 115–116 (HW 2: 508).

87 *Ibid.* p. 115 (HW 2: 507). Knox's translation of *Werden* as "budding" here probably over-accentuates the organic potential of the term, but later passages show it to be in keeping with Hegel's thought.

88 This is still interpreted, however, as a kind of *tragic* inclusion, but a tragedy constitutive of what is absolute: "... the tragedy which the Absolute eternally enacts with itself, by eternally giving birth to itself into objectivity, submitting in this objective form to suffering and death, and rising from its ashes into glory. ... [T]he Divine movement so presents itself that the pure abstraction of this nature, which were a purely infernal, purely negative power, is cancelled through living unification with the Divine nature." *Ibid.* p. 104 (HW 2: 495). Ironically, Hegel illustrates this tragedy not with the death and resurrection of Jesus but with Athena's establishment of justice from Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. On the role of Greek tragedy in *Naturrecht*, see K. de Boer, *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 14–25.

89 Hegel, *Natural Law*, p. 115 (HW 2: 508).

outside this living unity. This means that Hegel does not yet expect a full reconciliation of the concept and life. But “life” is no longer the dream of uncontaminated particularity,⁹⁰ nor does it serve as a byword to conceptuality. Hegel refuses to set individual morality apart from its connection to the legal order; he affirms the higher unity of *Sittlichkeit*, in which the formal negativity of the concept is converted into an “absolute negativity”⁹¹ that preserves living individuality in constant tension with the universality of law.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, I have attempted to shed light on an important sub-plot in Hegel’s early development: his conversion from being a Kantian complacent with conceptual form to a quasi-Romantic, extolling the excess of life over and against conceptual form, followed by his approximation to his later position in *Naturrecht*, where the negativity of conceptual form begins to be appreciated, along with the systematic connection of individual morality and legal authority. This development shows that the privilege Hegel grants to the concept was not granted innocently, that it came with a genuine appreciation of the tension between reason and life. He came to realize that this tension cannot be made into an absolute opposition; instead, the sides of the opposition are constituted in their relation and are thus only absolute in their relation.

While this is an important story to tell in light of its role in leading to this quintessentially Hegelian position, the story may also help clear up the “concept of the concept” as it appears in Hegel’s later thought. For the

90 One almost hears a self-critique in his now polemical, anti-vitalistic stance: “Indeed, those who conceive the nature of the organism to be the abstraction of some vital force must, strictly speaking conceived of the limbs and the brain and the heart and the viscera as something particular, positive, and accidental, and leave them out.” *Ibid.* p. 126 (HW 2: 521).

91 *Ibid.* p. 57 (HW 2: 437).

“Hegelian” concept – the qualification is usually deemed necessary – is often treated as a *deus ex machina*, a surreptitiously named metaphysical entity that has little, even nothing, to do with concepts as we normally understand them.⁹² Undoubtedly, this reading is not groundless, and much would have to be said to make sense of Hegel’s often strange remarks on the concept. However, the story we have recounted here helps illustrate the way the concept becomes a thematic issue in Hegel’s thought and so contributes to a clarification of its significance for him. Our story shows that the concept became thematic for Hegel not as an *ad hoc* theoretical insertion, but as the object of critique, in particular because of the perceived cleavage concepts open up in the subject of practical reason. When we see this position begin to be reversed in *Naturrecht*, it is still within the context of considering the role of the concept within practical reason, with reference to abstract universals. Were this not the case, Hegel would have no grounds for his critique against the formalist position. Even if he there begins to speak of the concept with characteristic dramatics, his thought it clearly bound to the consideration of concepts as elements of reason. The transformation will be significant, but also one of degree, when he later extols the concept as “the *logos*, the reason of that which is, the truth of what we call things”⁹³ and “what *is* in and for itself.”⁹⁴ The concept thus changes in Hegel’s thought from “the weakness of the law” to the fabric of the absolute, but it is the concept in a commensurate sense that undergoes this transformation. This, at least, is the story we have begun to tell.

92 Recent work adopting this approach to der Begriff in Hegel’s thought includes B. Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and J. Kreines, *Reason in the World: Hegel’s Metaphysics and Its Philosophical Appeal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). As Bowman writes, “‘Concept’ denotes a singulare tantum, the unique ‘entity’ whose various modifications and degrees of manifestation constitute the whole of reality. Thus Hegel is clearly not using the term ‘Concept’ to mean what we ordinarily mean by it ...” Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, p. 32.

93 *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), p. 39 (HW 5: 30).

94 *Ibid.* p. 49 (HW 5: 43). Translation altered. The original reads, “... *das Begriff als solcher aber das an und für sich Seinde ist.*”

6 The Notion of Contradiction in Hegel's Early Writings

In this chapter¹ my aim is to analyse the emergence of the concept of contradiction within Hegel's early writings, and to demonstrate that such a notion has a historical and practical origin: it develops from the critical consideration of the history of Western civilization as well as of Christianity, which such history has characterized.*

1 Hegel's works are cited with the following abbreviations:

N. = *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, nach den Handschriften der Kgl. Bibliothek in Berlin, ed. H. Nohl (Tübingen: Mohr, 1907) [*On Christianity. Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox, with an introduction, and fragments, trans. R. Kroner (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1948; New York: Harper, 1961)].

Br. = *Briefe von und an Hegel*, 4 Vols, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952, 1969) [*The Letters*, trans. C. Butler and Ch. Seiler with commentary by C. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984)].

GW = *Gesammelte Werke*, in Verbindung mit der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft, ed. der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968) ff.

References to English translations of Hegel's writings appear in square brackets.

*This article is a revised version of my essay "Sulle origini del concetto di contraddizione negli scritti giovanili di Hegel", *Studi Urbinati. B: Scienze Umane e Sociali* Vol. LXVIII (1997/1998), pp. 107–156.

Diremption and Opposition

At the beginning of Hegelian reflection, the notion of contradiction does not have the relevance which will be attributed to it in later works. From an examination of the terms “contradiction” (*Widerspruch*), “to contradict” (*widersprechen*) and “contradictory” (*widersprüchlich*, *widersprechend*) in the writings before Hegel’s arrival in Frankfurt it can be noted that he does not give any particular attention to such a concept from a theoretical point of view. Contradiction, in accordance with the meaning given to it in daily language, usually indicates conflict against the intellect, something incomprehensible and absurd, and thus has the function of protection against possible conceptual errors.² In certain passages, however, contradiction concerns things themselves: regarding virtues and feelings, as these by their very nature cannot submit to an external command, Hegel defines “contradictory” both the submission of virtue to authority, as well as the principle of commanding the feelings.³ In other passages, the concept has different meanings: as when Hegel implies “contradiction” to mean “protest”,⁴ or “to contradict” in its literal sense of “refuting”,⁵ or when “contradictory” is given the meaning of “different”.⁶ In some cases, “contradiction” simply means “incoherence”⁷ and only in few phases does it imply the opposition between two terms: between principles and experience,⁸ between the love of wealth and virtues,⁹ between the announced event and

2 Cf. *GW I*, 355 = *N.* 236: “Nun kommen aber geschichtliche Wahrheiten vor, von denen ein etwas geübter Verstand sogleich einsieht, daß sie seinen Gesetzen widersprechen.” Cf. also *GW I*, 75 = *N.* 355, 142 = 51, 143 = 52, 199 = 364, 284 = 155, 297 = 166, 308 = 175, 310 = 177, 311 = 177, 314 = 180, 347 = 209.

3 Cf. *GW I*, 284 = *N.* 155, 297 = 166, 347 = 209.

4 Cf. *GW I*, 378 = *N.* 231.

5 Cf. *GW I*, 290 = *N.* 160.

6 Cf. *GW I*, 281 = *N.* 152.

7 Cf. *GW I*, 302 = *N.* 170, 348 = 210.

8 Cf. *GW I*, 96 = *N.* 13, 156 = 63.

9 Cf. *GW I*, 252 = *N.* 114.

the desired event,¹⁰ between opinions,¹¹ between rights,¹² between external authority and individual freedom,¹³ between behaviours,¹⁴ and between the different parts contested.¹⁵ Finally, such opposition is considered also within the thing itself.¹⁶

Even when indicating the forms of diremption (*Entzweiung*) and opposition (*Entgegensetzung*), Hegelian language is not uniform: not only are these two terms sometimes used in the same way, but often words such as "separation" ("Trennung"), "distinction" ("Unterschied"), "difference" ("Unterscheidung"), "diversity" ("Verschiedenheit"), "contrast" ("Kontrast"), "contradiction" ("Widerstreit") are found in their place. In the present chapter the concepts of diremption and opposition will be taken to be distinct; however, at the same time, an attempt will be made to demonstrate their reciprocal relation. But what do "diremption" and "opposition" mean?

In the period preceding Hegel's arrival in Frankfurt, *diremption* indicated an historical and social situation of alienation, lack of freedom and separation of man from what is appropriate to his needs. The then young philosopher opposed ideals to such reality. The concept of diremption designates the reality which is to overcome or modify in accordance with an ideal. *Opposition* exists between such disunited reality and the ideal, between a negative term, the "is", to eliminate (or modify), and a positive term, the "ought", to establish. The ideal is harmonious and made to measure for man; it is the other end of opposition, the real pole, which bears diremptions and lacerations, those which are found in contemporary society. The extremes of diremption, inasmuch as they are real, can co-exist, as opposed to those of opposition, which reciprocally exclude each

10 Cf. *GW I*, 253 = *N.* 114.

11 Cf. *GW I*, 320 = *N.* 185.

12 Cf. *GW I*, 322 = *N.* 187.

13 Cf. *GW I*, 328 = *N.* 19.

14 Cf. *GW I*, 195 = *N.* 361.

15 See the following footnote.

16 Cf. *GW I*, 409 = *N.* 231 fn. An interpretation – which I have taken into consideration – of different passages in which the term "contradiction" occurs is offered by P. E. Cain, *Widerspruch und Subjektivität. Eine problemgeschichtliche Studie zum jungen Hegel* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978), SS. 15–16.

other: if reality is the negation of the ideal, the realization of this involves the removal of “negative” reality and its lacerations.

The young Hegel’s search moves on different planes, which intersect but at the same time remain distinct from each other. A first *plane* is *theoretical*, already presented in Tübingen, where Hegel acknowledges separation within the man of his times between reason and sensibility, intellect and sentiment, and firmly opposes a certain Kantianism which asserts such separation and puts forward the unrealistic claim that men must live only according to the dictates of reason, abstracting from their sensibility.¹⁷

This opposition between reason and sensibility, rather than being investigated from a psychological point of view, is shifted onto an *historical plane*. Taking as his object Christian religion whose advent marked the end of the ancient world, Hegel identifies the protagonists of a story (the Hebrews, Greeks, Christ, the Christians and the modern world), within which the diremptions and oppositions mentioned above are outlined. The end of Greek civilization, a model of harmony and happiness,¹⁸ coincided with the advent of Christianity.¹⁹ By championing an autonomous morality opposed to Pharisaic legalism through the figure of Jesus, Christianity upheld a religion of the heart, which was at the same time rational and fundamentally distant from the positivity that would subsequently characterize it.²⁰ As a matter of fact, just as it developed in the course of the history of Western civilization, it has not only imposed on man an external authority, projecting the realization of the ideal to heaven, but by sustaining political power, it has contributed to man’s alienation, marginalization, lack of freedom and independence, oppressed by external rules and by a despotic political power.²¹ Man will thus lose unity: he will find himself divided between reason and sensibility, morality and legality, the desire

17 Cf. *GW I*, 84–85 = *N.* 4, 94 = 12–13.

18 Cf. *GW I*, 367–368 = *N.* 221–222.

19 Cf. *GW I*, 163–164 = *N.* 70–71, 365–366 = 220.

20 Cf. *GW I*, 284 ff. = *N.* 155 ff.

21 Cf. *GW I*, 122 = *N.* 360, 201–202 = 365–366. Cf. also O. Pöggeler, *Philosophie und Revolution beim jungen Hegel*, in *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Freiburg and München: Alber, 1973), S. 20.

for autonomy and submission to heteronomous laws, and furthermore will live separated from those entities with which the Greek was in harmony: the State and divinity.²²

A third *dimension* of research is *political-cultural*. Hegel sees an analogy between his times and those of Christ: the opposition between Pharisee and Jesus, present in *Das Leben Jesu* and in the Bernese writings between 1795 and 1796, corresponds to that existing in Hegel's times among different philosophical perspectives. Of such an opposition, clear evidence is traceable in Hegel's letters to Schelling. On the one hand, there is orthodox theology allied to political power, thanks to which it has established itself and which, in exchange, has facilitated the teaching of disrespect for humanity, servility, man's inability to independently reach happiness; these conditions actually favour the political despotism which oppresses man and keeps him in a minority state.²³ On the other hand, it is the new philosophy, which guided by Kant, seeks to purify knowledge from theological waste, raises man, by acknowledging his dignity, brings the hope of a new liberating revolution, and strikes both against the alliance of religion and despotism as well as the spirit of constitutions which "has presently made a pact with self-interest and has founded its realm upon it".²⁴ What is in question here is the opposition between the situation of estrangement – which is implied by Hegel as the outcome of an historical process, and indicates the opposite of freedom, that is, enslavement – and the prospect combined with the need for re-appropriation, consisting of removing alienation.²⁵

22 Insofar as Christianity states the objectivity of God, it sanctions the *separation between man and the absolute*. An objectified God is a metaphysical entity, unfamiliar to man who consequently does not carry the absolute within himself (cf. *GW* I, 374–375 = *N.* 227–228). Furthermore, as a private religion, Christianity reinforces and sustains the *separation between the individual and the State*, originating from the establishment of despotism, so that the individual lives and works only for himself, and no longer for the State (cf. *GW* I, 369–370 = *N.* 223–224).

23 Cf. Hegel's letter to Schelling of 16 April 1796 (*Br.* I, 24 [35]).

24 *Br.* I, 24 [36].

25 Regarding the theme of alienation in the Bernese period cf. A. Peperzack, *Le Jeune Hegel et la Vision Morale du Monde* (La Haye: Nijhoff, 1960), pp. 53–58; M. Rossi, *Da Hegel*

The reflections of the young Hegel possess an open ethical characterization: to find a solution to the contemporary diremptions and oppositions, modify reality according to the ideal and re-conquer lost unity and autonomy. Hegel counterpoises certain ideals against breached reality (self-determination of the will, moral autonomy and intellectual freedom), which are considered not just part of the individual, but in an historical and political sense as belonging by right to the citizen and the people. But how can they be attained? The solution proposed by Hegel – not the reconciliation of opposites but the prevalence of one of the two – does not yet assume a dialectic form. Such prevalence is also preference: the positive and negative poles are not just of a logical-theoretical kind, but also historical and moral. At this point of his research, Hegel aims at maintaining the positive and rejecting the negative.

In the period of his stay in Bern (1793–1796), Hegel identified the solution to the problem in the practical philosophy of Kant, which gives a good test from both an *intra*-subjective and *inter*-subjective point of view. Kantian morality plays a good hand against heteronomous legalism, the expression of the diremption within man, in that it assigns him complete autonomous decision in the moral sphere, categorically rejecting any delegation to external positive norms. In *Das Leben Jesu*, on the basis of Kant's practical philosophy, Hegel presented Christ as the spokesperson of *an interior and autonomous morality* to replace the *exteriority of heteronomous legalism*: man must not seek in external authority the guiding criterion for practical life, as he already has within himself “a celestial voice”, the reason, according to which the world plan has been established, and for which only he needs to accomplish his destiny.²⁶ Referring to an autonomous foundation of the morale implies that to the simple “observance of the letter of the law” should be added a response “in the spirit of the law, to respect duty”, therefore of the law of reason;²⁷ this requires the re-composition of the separation between reason and sensibility. This is

a Marx, vol. I: *La Formazione del Pensiero Politico di Hegel* (Roma: Feltrinelli, 1970), pp. 113–118, 132, 135; M. Bondeli, *Hegel in Bern* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1990), pp. 127 ff.

26 Cf. *GW I*, 207 = *N.* 75, 212 = 79–80.

27 Cf. *GW I*, 216 = *N.* 83; cf. also *GW I*, 243 = *N.* 106, 250–251 = 112–113.

considered a goal which *must be* accomplished, it cannot already *exist*. A similar goal, maintains Hegel, is attainable only through an education of sensibility on the part of reason; a hierarchization between the two terms follows, which clearly emerges in the case of conflict, when reason is called upon to dominate over instincts and passions.²⁸ Herein arises an ambiguity in the Hegelian discourse, which will be explicitly highlighted (and eliminated) in the Frankfurt period: in Bern Hegel believed he could recompose the separation between reason and sensibility, against which he protested until his last years in Tübingen (1792–1793), thanks to Kantian morality. On the one hand, Hegel is firmly convinced that man “is a being made up of sensibility and reason”,²⁹ and therefore he attributes a significant role to sensibility in moral life. On the other hand, the predominance of morality, hence of reason as part of the nature of man, remains, in addition to a certain negative judgement towards sensibility.

Hegel's interest, as has already been mentioned, is directed mainly at history: when he talks of man, he does not imply as such the isolated individual, as the people.³⁰ Autonomy is not attainable individually, but only if political action re-unites reality, eliminating the jarring contrasts and lacerations which pervade it; that is to say, only if man manages to escape from the state of alienation into which he has fallen and retrieve happiness and strength.³¹ Individual morale therefore results in political action: an integral liberation of man is necessary. It is noted that Hegel, like other intellectuals in the Germany of that time, was enthusiastic about the French Revolution;³² however, after the events of the Reign of Terror, he

28 Cf. *GW I*, 212 = *N.* 80, 216 = 83, 218 = 85, 219 = 85–86, 234 = 98–99.

29 *GW I*, 78 = *N.* 357; cf. also *GW I*, 85 = *N.* 4.

30 Cf. J. Hyppolite, *Introduction à la Philosophie de l'Histoire de Hegel* (Paris: Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1948), pp. 19–22.

31 Cf. M. D'Abbiero, *Le Ombre della Comunità. Il Soggetto e la Realtà nella "Fenomenologia dello Spirito" di Hegel* (Genova: Marietti, 1991), pp. 16–18.

32 Cf. K. Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1844), SS. 32–34; H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1954²), pp. 3 ff.; G. Lukács, *Der junge Hegel. Über die Beziehungen von Dialektik und Ökonomie* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1954²), pp. 36–37; J. Ritter, *Hegel und die Französische Revolution* (Frankfurt

became disappointed with Jacobinist activities.³³ Nonetheless, this did not make him an enemy of the Revolution, rather the opposite: the principles upheld by the Revolution remained a task to accomplish.³⁴ This sweeping change indicated the opportunity of making an ideal real, of reprising the state of liberty and harmony present in the Greeks. The problem arose in rather new terms: which concrete routes can lead to a revolution which is a revival of the Greek culture, but does not repeat the facts of France? Hegel's answer is that great revolutions "must have been preceded by a still and secret revolution in the spirit of the age":³⁵ a revolution of thought which acts as a guide to political thought.³⁶ In this period, Kantian philosophy represents for Hegel a solution even from a political perspective. As the upholder of human dignity and freedom, Kant's philosophy heralds the possibility of a revolution capable of producing an upheaval in thinking,³⁷ which subsequently extended to the social sphere. By being the promoter and guide of such a movement, critical philosophy proposes itself as being corrective with regard to the excesses of the French Revolution and avoids repeating the tragic experiences of the Reign of Terror. This results in the political revolution being preceded by a philosophical one launched by criticism, just as the "ought" (*Sollen*), opposing the lazy obliging "is" (*Sein*), reveals itself as an application of Kantian morality, re-interpreted and radicalized in a political-social sense.³⁸

am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965²), SS. 19–20; Pöggeler, "Philosophie und Revolution beim jungen Hegel", in his *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Freiburg and München: Karl Alber, 1973), SS. 25–26.

33 Cf. Hegel's letter to Schelling of December 1794 (*Br. I*, 12 [29]).

34 Cf. Hegel's letter to Schelling of 16 April 1795 (*Br. I*, 23–25 [35–36]). Cf. also Lukács, *Der junge Hegel*, SS. 37–38; Ritter, *Hegel und die Französische Revolution*, SS. 21–22; K.-H. Nusser, *Hegels Dialektik und das Prinzip der Revolution. Der Weg zur praktischen Philosophie* (München and Salzburg: Pustel, 1973), S. 67.

35 *GW I*, 365 = *N*. 220.

36 Cf. Pöggeler, *Philosophie und Revolution beim jungen Hegel*, SS. 33–35.

37 Cf. *Br. I*, 23–24 [35]: "From the Kantian system and its highest completion I expect a revolution in Germany. It will proceed from principles that are present and that only need to be elaborated generally and applied to all hitherto existing knowledge."

38 Cf. Lukács, *Der junge Hegel*, S. 39; Rossi, *Da Hegel a Marx*, vol. I, pp. 116–117, 135.

The revolution is conceived by Hegel as an ideal set against the misery of the present, against *positivity*. He characterizes a doctrine as “positive” deriving from history and traditions, which is imposed by authority and has no rational justification. Even laws, rules and principles external to the subject, but which he must accept, are positive, and such is legality.³⁹ Finally, Hegel calls “positive” a religion which has developed over the centuries and which was not postulated by reason – or if it did accord with reason, it required belief only on authority.⁴⁰ The struggle for freedom and human dignity is the struggle against positivity.

Subsequently in Frankfurt, Hegel will, through experience, convince himself that ideal ancient values are impossible to reproduce: therefore, he will have to find new paths which will lead to the realization of the ideal. The problem of overcoming the opposites will become that of *unification* (*Vereinigung*) or *reconciliation* (*Versöhnung*) of opposites.⁴¹

Unification of Opposites

In the Frankfurt writings the oppositions are no longer resolved through the prevalence of one of the two terms over the other, but re-conducted to unity through a process of *unification* which removes them, but continues to contain within it the previously opposite terms. Hegel starts from

39 Cf. *GW I*, 343–344 = *N.* 205–206.

40 Cf. *GW I*, 287 = *N.* 157. For an extensive analysis of the “positive”, cf. Bondeli, *Hegel in Bern*, pp. 165 ff.; G. Portales, *Hegels frühe Idee der Philosophie. Zum Verhältnis von Politik, Religion, Geschichte und Philosophie in seinen Manuskripten von 1785 bis 1800* (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt: Frommann/Holzboog, 1994), SS. 37 ff., 112 ff.

41 According to M. Bondeli (“Zwischen radikaler Kritik und neuem Moralitätskonzept. Hegels Berner Denken”, in C. Jamme and H. Schneider (eds), *Der Weg zum System. Materialien zum jungen Hegel* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990], SS. 184–185), this issue is already present in the Bernese writings on positivity.

the idea of the loss of an originating unity,⁴² studies the development and establishment in history of diremptions and oppositions, takes note of those currently existing (he conducts studies on contemporary history and political economy),⁴³ and through these seeks to find a unifying solution. At the same time, he develops a monist concept, which finds expression in the concepts of “life” and “love”, and these imply a complete re-organization of his understanding of the world. Such research, now just in the initial stages, demonstrates two principal directives. On the one hand, Hegel is looking for a solution (a unification) which is not just an ideal, a task to accomplish, but something which already exists, in which opposites merge and unbind. On the other hand, he begins to prepare the logical tools of his thinking.

As has already been mentioned, worth noting is the biographical data concerning Hegel’s move to Frankfurt, which involved new conditions of life and the company of Hölderlin, Sinclair and the circle of friends which had formed around them.⁴⁴ In Frankfurt, Hegel acknowledges with more sensitivity than in Bern that men conduct a life suffocated by objectivity, by institutions which go against them. He realizes that a similar situation is not reversible, and that it is strongly rooted in the history of people, in the socio-economic structure, the “security of ownership” around which “legislation revolves and to which nearly all the citizens’ rights cling to”. Ownership, if held in disproportionately high quantities, represents a

42 Cf. E. De Negri, *Interpretazione di Hegel* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1943, 1969), p. 47; W. Hartkopf, *Der Durchbruch zur Dialektik in Hegels Denken. Studien zur Entwicklung der modernen Dialektik III* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1976), SS. 42 ff.

43 Cf. Rosenkranz, *Hegels Leben*, S. 86; Lukács, *Der junge Hegel*, SS. 225–238; L. Dickey, *Hegel. Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770–1807* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 181 ff.

44 Cf. D. Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971, 1988), SS. 22 ff., 65–67; O. Pöggeler, “Politik aus dem Abseits. Hegel und der Homburger Freundeskreis”, in C. Jamme and O. Pöggeler (eds), *Homburg von der Höhe in der deutschen Geistesgeschichte. Studien zum Freundeskreis um Hegel und Hölderlin* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), SS. 67–98; H. S. Harris, “Hegel und Hölderlin”, in C. Jamme and H. Schneider (eds), *Der Weg zum System. Materialien zum jungen Hegel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), SS. 245 ff.

constant threat to liberty and also “for the most liberal constitutional form”.⁴⁵ Hegel experiences the inadequacy of his previous ideas: society reveals itself to be so profoundly different to the Greek *polis* ideal which he would like to see established, that such an ideal becomes unattainable. In modern states, given their expansion, the individual no longer identifies himself with the State: “a great free people is thence a contradiction in itself.”⁴⁶ On the other hand, Hegel believes that a change is necessary and for it to be successful, it must imply a change in the way of thinking, which is the only way to avoid the excesses of the Reign of Terror. On his arrival in Frankfurt, armed with numerous ideas and convictions supported by Kantian philosophy, and stimulated by Hölderlin, Sinclair and other members of the *Freundeskreis*, Hegel ends up criticizing Kant and his own Bernese concepts, as well as re-formulating problems in a new way.

Two fragments highlight this change of perspective. In the first, “*Positiv wird ein Glauben genannt ...*”, Hegel outlines two alternative paths to unify subject and object. The first which is part of theoretical activity, sees the relationship between subject and object as the dependence of the first on the second and demands that the subject be placed in relation to “a potent and sovereign objective (authority)” – in this case the opposition persists. The second alternative, deriving from the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition, involves the overcoming of the opposition in pure subjectivity.⁴⁷ The first path is symptomatic of a diremption; the second, on the other hand, expresses the Hegelian Bernese concept focused on the overcoming of diremption. In the second fragment, “*Religion ...*”, Hegel overturns his own position:

The other extreme of dependence on an object is fearing the objects, running away from them, fearing a union, extreme subjectivity.⁴⁸

45 *GW* 2, S. 600.

46 *GW* 2, S. 594.

47 Cf. *GW* 2, 6 = *N.* 375.

48 *GW* 2, 8 = *N.* 376.

He now considers even the second alternative as insubstantial;⁴⁹ therefore, he rejects absolute subjectivity, its domination over the objective, and counterpoises the unification of subject and object against the predomination of one of the two terms. Such a unification takes place in *love*, a concept which plays a fundamental role in the subsequent developments of Hegel's thinking in Frankfurt, in that it establishes the *Hegelian way* of overcoming diremption.

From this moment, Hegel reviews his own positions and makes a strong criticism of Kantian morality.⁵⁰ It is criticized in that, after careful consideration, it would seem that by changing the relation between subject and object and re-conducting laws to subjectivity, this does not mean that autonomy is accomplished, as no autonomy can be attained through the repression of one part of man, but rather simply re-proposing the separation of *is* and *ought* with other forms.

Laws, if they are treated as concepts made and grasped by men, are moral; they are positive, on the other hand, if they are imposed by an external authority. The first form of law sets limits to opposition in one subject, it restricts the opposition of one side, one power, of a subject to other sides, other powers, of that same subject. The second, called also civil law, by contrast restricts the opposition of one subject to other subjects. As with moral laws, if the command does not operate as a concept, but as something extraneous, albeit subjective, they can become objective; similarly, positive civil laws could become moral, if no longer based on an extraneous force, but on their own concept. In this way it is shown that laws are objective, but in terms of (universal) concept, they are subjective: objectivity, positivity and the heteronomy of laws would be founded on the autonomy of human will. It could be believed that this might be the path to follow to win over positivity: highlighting the subjectivity and universality contained within laws. However, a similar path represents a partial

49 Cf. Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext*, SS. 63–64; M. Baum, *Die Entstehung der Hegelschen Dialektik* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1986), SS. 35–36.

50 According to Rosenkranz (*Hegels Leben*, SS. 86–88), in 1798 Hegel wrote a commentary to Kant's *Metaphysik der Sitten* (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1797), which has unfortunately been lost.

solution, as subjugation to an external and objective element remains; it is just transferred from the exteriority to the interiority of man:

between the Shaman of the Tungus, the European prelate who rules church and state, the Voguls, and the Puritans, on the one hand, and the man who listens to his own command of duty, on the other, the difference is not that the former make themselves slaves, while the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves, while the latter carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave. For the particular – impulses, inclinations, pathological love, sensuous experience, or whatever else it is called – the universal is necessarily and always something alien and objective.⁵¹

Man thus finds himself divided between his own reason, which forces on him an obligation which he feels to be extraneous, and sensibility. Kantian morality, on a par with legality, submits the subject, with his particular inclinations, to an objective and extraneous authority, that is, universal reason as expression of law. Kantian autonomy is thence heteronomous under false colours.

To achieve autonomy, and therefore unification, it is necessary, Hegel maintains, to rise above the sphere of morality to a level in which law is deprived of the legal element and removed as such. The problem is of the (logical) relation between universal and particular, on the one hand, and (ontological) between reality and possibility on the other: the law, the Kantian ought, is universal, an ideal which, as such, is only possible.⁵² On the contrary, the subject in its entirety, as unit of rationality and sensibility, makes up the particular. Each *ought* is always to be found in contrast to the real, meaning the dominion of the concept, therefore the separation. The alternative can only consist in an *is*, in “a modification of life”, in which morality is no longer an objective to achieve (in that sense, only possible), but rather is already accomplished, and in which there is no

51 *GW* 2, 152 = *N.* 265–266 [211].

52 According to Hegel, Kant himself “declares that rational creatures (a remarkable juxtaposition of words) can fail but cannot attain that ideal” (*GW* 2, 156 = *N.* 267 [213]). Cf. Th. Baumeister, *Hegels frühe Kritik an Kants Ethik* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1976), SS. 66 ff.

longer opposition between concept and reality, “is” and “ought”. In this way, the command would disappear as such, and the concept which expresses it would merely be an exterior means of expression. Thus, two distinctive characteristics of the “fulfilment of law” (that is, the unification of the universal and particular, reality and possibility, subject and object) are identified: (a) unification is a being, not a task to accomplish; (b) in no way is it a concept as to essence, that is universal, but it possesses only the external form of expression of the concept. Such a fulfilment is the “unification [*Einigkeit*] of inclination with the law” – or, to use a Schillerian term, the “correspondence [*Übereinstimmung*] of inclination with the law”⁵³ –, that is, “an inclination so to act as the laws may command”,⁵⁴ but without any impositions, so that the law loses its legal form. The union reached is called “love” by Hegel: the unification of opposites in which both extremes, inclination and law, remain distinct, but cease to be respectively particular and universal, and their reciprocal opposition disappears, being present only as a possibility. This definition of love makes up an important phase in the development of the dialectical method and the Hegelian concept of contradiction.

Hegel identifies in love a unifying element which is no longer an ideal but is something real, through which he tries to answer the question of how it is possible to live in a non-alienated way in a world which has become extraneous to man, a world which oppresses him and is so deeply rooted in history and the spirit of the people, that it is wishful thinking to try to set it against an ideal which is a simple duty of reason. In Bern, the extremes, the ideal and the real, were opposed in such a way as to exclude one or the other; the solution consisted in the transformation of the real and the realization of the ideal. Nevertheless, recognizing that both objectivity (legality, positivity) as much as the ideal (morality, subjectivity), are bearers

53 In *Über Anmut und Würde* (Leipzig: Göschen, 1793), Schiller had characterized the unity of reason and sensibility as “correspondence”. Hegel inherited such a concept, however he maintained that the opposites do not disappear but are preserved, albeit not any longer as opposites. Cf. K. Düsing, *Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1976), SS. 41–42, 46.

54 *GW* 2, 157–158 = *N.* 268 [214].

of diremption, what remains is divided reality. Therefore, how is a “true union” possible?

True union, or love proper, – Hegel says – exists only between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another's eyes living beings from every point of view; in no respect is either dead for the other.⁵⁵

With these formulations, Hegel limits the scope of the unification operated on by love: it does not take place between subject and object, but only between living beings, that is, between subjects. The end of the quoted passage underscores this feature (“in no respect is either dead for the other”), and affirms the exclusion of “dead”, of objectivity, from the relation of love, therefore from unification. Love “excludes all oppositions”, and in this it is distinct from both intellect (I path), for which the manifold remains manifold, provided the contrast is not overcome in the unity which it establishes, and reason (II path), which opposes its subjective determining to the determined object. Love, on the other hand, as unification of living beings, is “the whole of life”, in which the manifold is not contained “in the same way as it is in this sum of many particular and isolated feelings”. Even so, a certain manifold is required: in love relations human beings, each of whom are life itself, embark on a relationship with each other and give way to a duplication of life.

[I]n love, life is present as a duplicate of itself and as a single and unified self [*als eine Verdopplung seiner Selbst, und Einigkeit desselben*].⁵⁶

Besides being an inter-subjective feeling, which unites living beings who relate with each other through it, love is an intra-subjective feeling, which re-conducts unity within the individual when previously divided between duty and inclination, law and nature, the universal and particular: now the living being, unified within itself, distinct from the other but no longer separated from it, feels his or her own life and at the same time alive

55 *GW* 2, 84 = *N.* 379 [304].

56 *GW* 2, 85 = *N.* 379 [305]. In this passage guided the structure of contradiction; Cain, *Widerspruch und Subjektivität*, S. 20.

in his or her unity with the other. A similar sentiment of life is possible only through love, this means that it was previously absent.

The origin of Hegelian dialectic has been traced back to the concept of love.⁵⁷ In the joint presence of separation and unification, of manifold and unity of life, the structure of contradiction has been recognized. In unification, both meanings of the Hegelian dialectic are acknowledged: the theoretical one, the unification of opposites, and the practical one, that is, the liberation or re-appropriation of what had become extraneous. Leaving aside the latter, let us dwell on the first meaning, the logical-theoretical one, which represents an element of novelty regarding Bern, and on which a new way of interpreting the praxis is based. In reality, the passage in question presupposes a logic, but only gives it as presupposed. Hegel does not formulate in logical terms the unification of opposites (or separates) in love, neither does he explain in which way opposites (*Entgegengesetzte*) are to be understood, unified (“vereinigt”), yet diverse (“verschieden”),⁵⁸ although no longer separated (“getrennt”). The concept of love makes up an important phase in the complex intellectual development which will lead to the elaboration of the future dialectic concept of contradiction. The fact, however, that a logical formulation is lacking, as is also a specific analysis of the notions of opposition or separation – the term “contradiction” is even absent – makes it difficult to presume that Hegel is already aware of the method he is about to prepare. After all, the dialectic as logical method, which Hegel will develop in Jena, despite maintaining some points of contact with the unification of opposites (or separates) in love, will distinguish itself from this by basing itself on reason, rather than on sentiment.⁵⁹

57 Cf. Th. L. Haering, *Hegel. Sein Wollen und sein Werk. Eine chronologische Entwicklungsgeschichte der Gedanken und der Sprache Hegels*, Bd. I (Leipzig: Teubner, 1929), SS. 366–390; Lukács, *Der junge Hegel*, SS. 162–163; Rossi, *Da Hegel a Marx*, vol. I, pp. 184–185. *Contra* Düsing and Baum (see fn. 59).

58 Love is “the relation of different to one another” (*GW* 2, 159 = N. 268 [215]).

59 Cf. Düsing, *Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik*, SS. 43 ff.; Baum, *Die Entstehung der Hegelschen Dialektik*, SS. 38 ff.

Hegel intends to make an all-absorbing use with the unifying principle of love. It has already been said that it operates, not just on an intra-subjective level but also on an inter-subjective one. This applies not only to the relationship between individuals, but also in the social sphere.

Hegel examines the concrete case of violence. By committing the act, the criminal removes the law, as universal concept, and replaces it with a real content, the crime. In turn, the law opposes the crime by punishing it and opposes the criminal's life. Before the crime is committed, neither separation nor opposition existed. Only through the act did the opposition of law-crime arise, transforming itself into punishment-life, where punishment constitutes the content of law. In a context of positive justice, any reconciliation is impossible: either (i) the self-same law is removed, so the first opposition (law-crime) remains and the guilty individual remains unpunished, or (ii) justice follows its own course by punishing the criminal, and vindicating the crime, but also in this case the action made remains as having happened and is not removed even with the punishment. In order for a reconciliation to be possible, which does not imply the elimination of justice, but unites the two extremes and effectively eliminates the opposition, Hegel states it is necessary to rise to a superior level, that of *fate*. By fate, he means the reaction that the criminal has provoked against himself by committing the crime.

Law and punishment cannot be reconciled, but they can be transcended [*aufgehoben*] if fate can be reconciled.⁶⁰

Compared to law, fate has the advantage of moving in the sphere of life, not in that of insuperable oppositions of absolute realities.

It is in the fact that even the enemy is felt as life that there lies the possibility of reconciling fate.⁶¹

In so far as it originates from the act as reaction commensurate to action, the law is recognized as posterior to life and submitted to it. Consequently,

60 *GW* 2, 188 = *N.* 279 [228].

61 *GW* 2, 196 = *N.* 282 [232].

the separation which existed between the law and the criminal dissolves and life shows itself capable of healing the separation, removing the act, law and punishment.

Here love unifies the universal and particular, law and criminal act, or better still, the totality (the life) and the single (the guilty). This reconciliation is possible as two conditions are present, one is ontological, the other practical-subjective: (a) that opposites (the attacker and the attacked), therefore also the hostile element, are not absolute realities, in which case they are not able to be unified; rather, they are parts of a unique totality of life; (b) that the criminal acquires awareness of having violated by violating the life of another, both life in its totality, from which he has separated himself, and his own life. Consequently, he atones his crime, perceives the destruction of his own life as loss of life which has become hostile to him, and wishes to reconcile himself to it. Love is the unifying principle which reconciles the guilty (the single) with life (the totality).

Nevertheless, love is not a complete principle. Since it only unifies subjects, love leaves unchanged outside itself objectivity which therefore remains external and contrasting it. That is why love may be unhappy. So may be the beautiful soul that recoils from the struggle, assuming a consciously passive position in an attempt to avoid fate and to rise above the law.⁶² But even if it is happy, as in the case of lovers, love becomes possible only on condition that it excludes objectivity. On the point of verifying the validity of his solutions, Hegel finds himself forced to ascertain the limitations. Precisely because love only unifies subjects, the unchanged and separate reality, implied first and foremost as each person's *property*, leads back to a separation between lovers, whose unification is moreover undermined by their *corporeality*, that is, their individuality. Therefore, the union which is reached is only limited to certain moments; otherwise, lovers remain *objectively separated*.⁶³

We have seen that Hegel does not logically explain how opposites are to be understood as being unified in love, different but no longer separated. This, however, means that the unification obtained is more desired than

62 Cf. *GW* 2, 201–206 = *N.* 285–287.

63 Cf. *GW* 2, 84–95 = *N.* 379–382.

fulfilled. It is possible, as the fragment "*Glauben ist die Art ...*" will show, only if the opposites belong to a "common ground", made up of life as totality, of which they are modifications. It is in fact thanks to the assumption of a kind of Spinozian monism that Hegel succeeds in reconciling the opposites. Under the influence of his friends Hölderlin and Schelling, as well as of the debate started in Germany following the publication of F. H. Jacobi's work, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*,⁶⁴ Hegel borrows the idea of a totality from Spinoza, of which all things are modifications and in which opposites, in recognizing themselves as parts of the totality, reconcile. Life corresponds to the Spinozian substance and the single parts are not independent of each other, but rather in close reciprocal relation to each other. Undoubtedly, Hegel's Spinozism does not consist in a literal adherence to the Spinozian doctrine of substance: Hegel reviewed, transformed and adapted Spinoza's concept to suit the needs of his philosophy. The notion of life is not, however, well-defined in the Frankfurt fragments: it embraces the totality of the real, but the Hegelian discourse, the oppositions which are sometimes encountered, even the unifying principle of love, remain confined to the sphere of practical activity. This leads to re-dimensioning its extensive and totalizing scope.

Through the notion of life, Hegel has introduced an idea of totality into his discourse which has made ethics lead to ontology. This could seem to be a deviation from his original intentions: the achievement of true autonomy, the attainment of which requires overcoming the diremptions that have torn the modern world. In reality, Hegel remains faithful to his original inspiration: man can attain autonomy and freedom, overcome

64 Schelling had professed Spinozism in his letter to Hegel of 4 February 1795 (cf. *Br. I*, 22) and in *Vom Ich als Princip der Philosophie oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* (Tübingen: Heerbrandt, 1795), sent to Hegel with the letter of 21 July 1795 (cf. *Br. I*, 27–29). Although Hegel had already read Jacobi's text in Tübingen, he drew closer to Spinoza in particular in Frankfurt in contact with Hölderlin. Regarding Hegel's Spinozism in Frankfurt cf. F. Chiereghin, *L'Influenza dello Spinozismo nella Formazione della Filosofia Hegeliana* (Padova: CEDAM, 1961), pp. 47 ff.; K. Düsing, *Hegel und die Geschichte der Philosophie. Ontologie und Dialektik in Antike und Neuzeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), SS. 171 f.

the diremptions that tear him apart, *only if he thinks of himself as part of a whole*.⁶⁵ As a result, the diremptions Hegel has so accurately and radically identified are not resolved at a practical level, but at an ontological one, through their reconciliation within the all-encompassing totality which is life. Hegel himself is aware of the frailty of this solution and soon after in Jena he will give impetus to a new direction in his reflection.

Up to now, the absence of a logical formulation of the contradiction and other related notions has been ascertained. An initial in-depth logical examination of unification and opposition concepts is present in “*Glauben ist die Art ...*”. What is the issue here is faith, implied as a unification of opposites – meaning members of an antinomy (“Antinomie”) – present in our representation. Such unification does not consist in a third term, but in the unifying action itself, which being reflected, that is to say, present to consciousness, will establish the believed, the object of faith. For this to take place however, it is necessary that the opposites are *felt* and *recognized* as conflicting (“widerstreitende”), that there is awareness, in an immediate or reflected manner, of such a relation of opposition. Antinomy signifies the opposition *recognized* by reflection and therefore present in the consciousness. The awareness of unification, the recognition of opposites, is only possible on condition that these have already engaged in reciprocal relation and are held together by a belonging to a common ground: they are therefore unified. Insofar as it already exists between the opposite terms,

the union is the standard [measuring rod] against which the comparison is made, against which the opposites appear as such, appear as unsatisfied [unfulfilled].⁶⁶

It is not, however, only the *presupposed gnoseological foundation for the recognition of the opposites*: the latter, understood as something limited, precisely due to being opposites, cannot subsist as such, but they have to cancel themselves (“sich aufheben”), so that they are possible only if the

65 Concerning the relationship between autonomy and totality cf. D'Abbiero, *Le Ombre della Comunità*, pp. 21 ff.

66 *GW* 2, 10 = N. 382 [H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development. Toward the Sunlight 1770–1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 512].

union is presupposed. This, if it were already the condition for which opposites were recognized, now becomes *the necessary ontological foundation as it can give an antinomy*, therefore, concludes Hegel, “the union ought to exist”. Such a process from the opposites to their unification simply demonstrates, however, that the union ought to exist, not that it exists; therefore, it can only be believed. Although here the discourse seems to lean towards a typically ethical characterization of unification, in reality – as will shortly be seen – it is not exclusively an act of will.

At this stage, union, placed in conscience, remains untested and can only be believed. The situation does not seem to change if the structure of judgement is examined, on the base of which Hegel affirms the synonymy of union and being:

in every proposition the copula “is” expresses the union of subject and predicate – a being.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, judgement does not guarantee the reality of such a union. Being affirmed in judgement, as the being of any union, states Hegel, “can only be believed”. The belief presupposes a being, but the being is independent, it exists regardless of the fact that it is believed or not, that it is or is not for us: “from thinkability being does not follow”, neither is it necessary that the being be reflected, that is, represented by conscience. By this the greatest extension is affirmed of the sphere of being compared to that of faith; hence, the indemonstrability (namely independence) of being derives from the fact that it is not founded on the conscience or on faith, but solely on itself. Even the union (synonym of being) exists, therefore, regardless of the recognition of antinomies by reflection, although union is the necessary premise to allow antinomies to exist. Such union cannot but exist, it is possible “only in One Being”.⁶⁸ And here we return to the concept of totality in which opposites reconcile.

Even in this fragment, notwithstanding the wealth of themes developed, differentiated analysis of the meanings and uses of the concepts is

67 *GW* 2, 11 = *N.* 383 [513].

68 *Ibid.*

not presented. However, the Frankfurt reflections have attained a result: the unification of opposites has been wrested from the thinking which relegated it to an ideal to be achieved and placed it in the dynamism of human reality. In this context the problem arises of the relation between the unity of being (the totality) and the oppositions of reflection. And thus, as will be subsequently outlined, the problem of contradictions and their overcoming arises.

Reality of Contradiction

The need expounded up to now for the identification of a unifying principle and a unifying totality is also present in the Frankfurt political writings. Whilst historical and religious research seeks to return to the origins of the Western Christian world, political writings concern the present and highlight contemporary forms of diremption. The Frankfurt research is conducted around different contexts, but converge with regard to objectives and general issues. The development of the historical and religious theme is due not just to an interest in the topic itself but also to an attempt to understand human reality, contemporary society; this is a tendency already present in Bern which now, in connection to the new concept Hegel is developing, assumes clearer and more defined outlines.

Already with regard to love, it has been established that the obstacle to union substantially originates from objectivity, more clearly defined as *corporeality* and above all as *property*. This is expressed in more radical terms in the political writings. In "*Sollte das politische Resultat ...*"⁶⁹ it is highlighted as the plurality of rights, their establishment and the consequent contradictions which are produced among them (rights reflect individuals and defend their respective properties) originate from the defence of property. Such a defence, even if it is the basic principle of the constitution,

69 Cf. *GW* 5, 5–14.

does not carry out the function of a unitary principle, but produces on the contrary a privatization of the public property, placing itself at the origin of the contradictions and conflicts between the self-same owners and possessors of rights. A lack of unity follows, which is a lack of a State, given that the current one is "nothing more than the sum of rights that have been taken away from the State".⁷⁰

Rights are the establishment in fixed form of possessions which are the objectification of human activity. The contradiction is produced in a situation of fragmentariness and disjointed multiplicity of possessions (*objective multiplicity*) established in the form of rights (*activity of reflection*) and lacking a unitary principle (*separation*, rather than *union*). Reflection, as the activity of the intellect, does not just concern the cognitive sphere of the real, since according to the way of understanding reality human action also adapts itself. The existing contradictions and oppositions denote a state of minority, dissatisfaction, alienation, oppression of man – a state of unhappiness. They find expression in the thinking of the young Hegel not as contradictions of discourse, but as objects of discourse.

The fragment "*Der immer sich vergrößernde Widerspruch ...*"⁷¹ presents a frequent and conscious use of the term "contradiction", which has a dual connotation: on the one hand, recalling "*Daß die Magistrate von den Bürgern gewählt werden müssen*",⁷² (i) the contradiction concerns the discrepancy between the representation of an harmonious life which men aspire to, and real life; on the other hand, (ii) it is given within life itself, among the various social phenomena as read in "*Sollte das politische Resultat ...*"⁷³

70 A. Massolo, *Prime Ricerche di Hegel*, Serie di Lettere e Filosofia (Urbino: Pubblicazioni dell'Università di Urbino, 1959), p. 76.

71 Cf. *GW* 5, 16–18. For a commentary on the fragment cf. C. Luporini, "Un Frammento Politico Giovanile di Hegel", in *Filosofi Vecchi e Nuovi* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1947), pp. 56–111; Harris, *Hegel's Development*, pp. 440–445; R. Bodei, *Scomposizioni. Forme dell'individuo moderno* (Torino: Einaudi, 1987), pp. 15–58; H. Kimmerle, "Anfänge der Dialektik", in C. Jamme and H. Schneider (eds), *Der Weg zum System. Materialien zum jungen Hegel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), SS. 277 ff.

72 Cf. *GW* 2, 101–109.

73 Cf. Hartkopf, *Der Durchbruch zur Dialektik in Hegels Denken*, SS. 164–165.

Hegel begins by underlining the contradiction between the life men aspire to and the life they actually live, that is, between life as harmonious totality, and the present, ripped apart and pervaded by contradictions. It seems that the Bernese conflict between ideal and real returns here, the totality appearing more as something desired, thought, sought after (precisely an ideal), than actually existent. However, Hegel maintains, that the overcoming of the subsisting life, (i) “of what is from the point of view of Nature negative” (that is, the limitations of real life as opposed to the life aspired to) and (ii) “from that of the will positive” (that is to say, the concrete contradictions seen in their juridic and authoritative form), is not the outcome of an act of will, is not operated on through violence, as the latter, being nothing other than “particular against particular”, would not take away limitations and separations. The overcoming of contradictions is however inherent in the very structure of reality, it is generated by necessity:

The feeling of the contradiction between Nature and the subsisting life is the need that it should be overcome; and it gets to this point when the subsisting life has lost its power and all its worth, when it has become a pure negative.⁷⁴

Hegel relativizes the actions of single factors operating in history: it is life in its evolution, at a given moment and throughout its entire development, which will eliminate the old life, therefore the contradictions between nature as idea and existing life. This trust in history, with which Hegel overcomes the willingness of the action, could be interpreted as an extreme act of wanting to believe – as all other paths are closed – that there will be a change necessarily through the internal developments of history. For the time being, the idea remains that such a change takes place in practice, but not as a moral act, attainable with a mere effort of willingness: whilst this is not determined by a particular real situation, which even if proposing change, the overcoming of contradictions however, lacking certain

74 *GW* 5, 17 [Harris, *Hegel's Development*, pp. 442–443].

conditions ("when the subsisting life has lost its power and all its worth, when it has become a pure negative"), does not have the opportunity to be fulfilled.⁷⁵

Once more Hegel identifies in property the historic cause of contradiction. In the old life, in which private property already predominated, it was still possible to have "an orderly dominion over one's property" and "a contemplation and enjoyment of one's completely subservient little world"; such a limitation of life was then compensated by religion (an "ascension into Heaven in thought"). With time, however, property was undermined on the one side and grew on the other, to the extent that two opposing extremes of poverty and wealth were created. The dominion of property produced particularization and fragmentation, transforming life into a "dry life of the intellect", in which, on the one hand, the bad conscience of making property absolute increased, and on the other, because of extreme fragmentation, suffering increased widening the gap between nature and life, between life aspired to and the life lived. The start of overcoming this contradiction, here indicated in a clearly dynamic manner, can only take place when this is no longer an opposition between an ideal and a reality, but rather between two realities:

As particular against particular the nature of its actual life is the only assault or negation of the worst life, and such a negation cannot be object of an intentional activity.⁷⁶

Now the limited, the existent, can be assaulted by its own truth, that is the right, which as an expression of ownership, expresses the very essence of this life founded on possession, and is placed in contradiction with truth itself. The limited founds its dominion not on the violence of particular against particular, but rather on the universality of that right, that truth

75 Previously, the overcoming of oppositions, concerning the individual in his relations with society (crime and punishment), required as a condition in order to begin awareness on the part of the individual. In the new context, the human subject is still in question, but as society: awareness is only a moment in the entire process, as overcoming the given situation can only take place if specific objective conditions are produced which make it possible.

76 *GW* 5, 18.

which it claims for itself and which “must be removed and attributed to that part of life which is requested”. As a matter of fact, strength and honour of the right derive from that dignity of the universal compared to which the impulses contradicting it become timid and obsequious, to the extent that “to the positive of the subsisting being, which is a negation of nature, is left its truth, that there must be a right”.⁷⁷ In order for a change to take place, it is necessary to rip from subsisting life the truth of right which it has given itself.

In summing up, insofar as the subsisting reality is pervaded by particular contradictions and conflicts between different parts which are expressed in juridic terms as contradictions among rights, that is, among owners, such reality enters into conflict with the life aspired to (with nature), which conforms in turn to the needs and desires of man. At first glance, it would seem that the type of more universal contradiction depends on that concerning particular contradictions; however, in the context of the monist concept which Hegel is elaborating, even the universal is a moment, a part of the whole. The contradiction between nature and existing life no longer consists in the static opposition between ideal and real, as the ideal is a product of life itself, not external to it, so that contradiction reveals itself to be a conflict between two dynamic powers, between two “particulars” in relation to each other.

At this level, Hegel has not yet defined the meaning or meanings of contradiction, nevertheless he has reached a fundamental point: each contradiction requires its own overcoming, it cannot be sustained and, by necessity not by will, is removed by the processing of the whole within which it is included. The notion of contradiction thus reveals its dialectic-revolutionary character: not operating in view of an improvement of conditions – leaving the path open to worsen social contradictions, and consequently, intensifying the contradictions between real life and nature – leads to a motion of changes in the course of history which moves in the direction of that harmony and unity to which men aspire.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Cf. Hartkopf, *Der Durchbruch zur Dialektik in Hegels Denken*, S. 165. The revolutionary character of contradiction has been contested by Rossi (*Da Hegel a Marx*,

Contradiction and Complexity

Although up to now Hegel has not given a theoretical foundation to the notion of contradiction, at the end of his stay in Frankfurt, a specific use of such a concept is present, which, further elaborated and deepened, will recur in subsequent writings: *the logical figure of contradiction is used to express complex realities*. From an analysis of the concepts of “individuality” and “multiplicity” it emerges that contradiction is the only concept suited to expressing the living being, the only way in which reflection can understand it.

In the first lines of the fragment “*Absolute Entgegensetzung ...*”, Hegel takes into consideration the living being, which he calls “individual” or “organization”. From the “multiplicity of life” derives the diversity of points of view none of which can ascend to an absolute value, as each one is relativized in relation and/or in opposition to each other.⁷⁹ Within life as plurality of the living beings, a living being as part of such plurality, insofar as it is alive, “is itself an infinite multiplicity”, and “is to be regarded purely as something related, as having its being purely in union”. The other part of life, “also an infinite multiplicity, is to be regarded as solely in opposition”, that is, as separated from the first and having its being only in such a separation; in the same way, even the first part is determined “as having its being solely through a separation from the second one”.⁸⁰ The first part is the individual, implied as organic life, whose manifold is considered solely

vol. I, pp. 267, 270), who observed in this fragment a theory of reconciliation with existing reality in order to “give back organicity of the State”. According to Lukács (*Der junge Hegel*, SS. 193, 195–196), however, despite being at a level “still very far from historical concreteness which he will reach in his *Philosophy of History*”, Hegel already shows a “realistic understanding of social evolution”.

79 Regarding the perspectivist character of the discourse conducted by Hegel cf. Rossi, *Da Hegel a Marx*, vol. I, p. 249; Cain, *Widerspruch und Subjektivität*, S. 58; Baum, *Die Entstehung der Hegelschen Dialektik*, SS. 69–70. On the fragment in question cf. also S. Zhang, *Hegels Übergang zum System. Untersuchungen zum sog. “Systemfragment”* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1990), SS. 61 ff.

80 *GW* 2, 341 = N. 346 [309].

in relation, whose being consists in such a relation, and which at the same time is determined only through negation of what gradually is opposed; it

can also be regarded as being differentiated in itself, as a mere multiplicity, because the relation between the separated is not more intrinsic to it than the separation between that which is related. On the other hand, it must also be considered as capable of entering into relation with what is excluded from it, as capable of losing its individuality or being linked with what has been excluded.⁸¹

Likewise, even the other part of life, the manifold, which was excluded by an organic whole,

must nevertheless be conceived, in itself and in abstraction from that organization, not only as absolutely manifold, yet at the same time itself internally related, but also as connected with the living whole which is excluded from it.⁸²

In brief, unity and manifold are defined within the whole as relations and oppositions both between the parts and internally in each of these: in this way, the relationship is determined between subject and object, part and whole, man and world. Such a relationship is understood by reflection not to be just a relation but also an opposition, both being seen as reversible points of view: both the individual and the manifold possess the features of their internal relation and external opposition with what is the opposite to it, just as those of internal opposition and relation with the excluded. Regarding the concept of individuality, Hegel maintains that it “includes opposition to infinite variety and also inner union with it”.⁸³ A similar concept is contradictory: it is under the same aspect, in that it is a living being, that the individual is in relation and at the same time in opposition to the infinite manifold. Placing such a being as the subject of the predication in judgement, two propositions are hence produced as having the same subject, opposite to each other and both true. In the following passage, the logical figures of Kantian antinomy may be identified. To the *thesis* that “A human being is an individual life in so far as he is to

81 *Ibid.* [309–310].

82 *Ibid.* [310].

83 *Ibid.* The translation has been slightly modified (V. R.).

be distinguished from all the elements and from the infinity of individual beings outside himself", follows the *antithesis*: "But he is only an individual life in so far as he is at one with all the elements, with the infinity of lives outside himself".⁸⁴ Alongside this antinomy of being other and being one of a human being in relation to the totality of the remaining individual lives, Hegel raises a second antinomy, that of divisibility and indivisibility of the totality of life. To the *thesis* that "He [a human being] exists only inasmuch as the totality of life is divided into parts, he himself being one part and all the rest the other part", is set against by the *antithesis* that "he exists only inasmuch as he is no part at all and inasmuch as nothing is separated from him".⁸⁵ Both the antinomies are the result of the union, in the concept of individuality, of the *opposition to the manifold of life* and the *union with the manifold of life*.⁸⁶ The way the reflection works – that the contradiction avoids the principle of contradiction – would not be comprehensible if another passage were not to be considered of the same text, which reveals the explicit formulation of contradiction as a notion suited to expressing specific realities.

In the text in question, Hegel maintains that "life cannot be regarded as union or relation alone but must be regarded as opposition as well". Life therefore would be defined as the "union of opposition and relation [*die Verbindung der Entgegensetzung und Beziehung*]",⁸⁷ but expressed this way, in a language and with concepts of reflection, such a definition is not appropriate: this union may be isolated in turn and could be opposed by the non-union. It should therefore be said that "Life is the union of union and non-union [*die Verbindung der Verbindung und der Nichtverbindung*]",⁸⁸ in order to involve the totality of what exists (the union of a term and its complement). The reflection understands a single thing in that it isolates and fixes it in a specific form, but such a way of understanding can never be sufficient to express life: every attempt to express the concept of life is vain and each formulation is inadequate, since

84 *GW* 2, 341–342 = *N.* 346 [310].

85 *GW* 2, 342 = *N.* 346 [310].

86 Cf. Baum, *Die Entstehung der Hegelschen Dialektik*, SS. 70–71.

87 *GW* 2, 343 = *N.* 348 [312].

88 *GW* 2, 344 = *N.* 348 [312].

it is possible to demonstrate in the case of every expression that, insofar as something is posited, at the same time another thing is not posited, is excluded.⁸⁹

A progress towards infinity is created in this way, to which terms can be applied only by bearing in mind that the whole is not something posited by reflection, “but has a character of its own, namely, that of being a reality beyond all reflection”.⁹⁰ Using concepts of reflection, it is impossible to understand life as an infinite whole, outside which nothing remains opposed or excluded. The phrase “union of union and non-union” – as it has been revealed – “constitutes the first purest but also most abstract expression of the formal structure of the whole”.⁹¹ Only if understood, in connection to the above-mentioned, in a non-reflective manner, *does it express the totality of life in its contradictoriness*.

The terms of contradiction exhaust the entire reality. In order to express the infinite totality of life, not to exclude anything, Hegel is led, at the end of his stay in Frankfurt, to use contradiction, which indeed includes totality, what is determined and what opposes it, union and non-union, nothing excluded. Contradiction, *not a contradiction of thought*, within a theory – which as such is rejected even by Hegel, who agrees with Aristotle in recognizing validity in the principle of contradiction – contradiction implied as a *concept used to express a certain reality*, does not indicate falsity of discourse or ontological impossibility, but rather a conceptual difficulty to express a complex reality. In certain cases, it is the only suitable notion which can express such conceptual complexity, without however building an insurmountable barrier against thought. Regarding the case in question, it expresses life in its totality. A similar use of contradiction is not possible for all cases of conflict, struggle, antagonism, for which Hegel also uses the term “contradiction”, but solely to express specific realities which are difficult to understand through thought. A similar thinking *does not contain any logical contradiction*, but rather *uses the logical figure of contradiction*.

89 *Ibid.* The translation has been modified (V. R.).

90 *Ibid.*

91 F. Chiereghin, *Dialettica dell'Assoluto e Ontologia della Soggettività in Hegel. Dall'Ideale Giovanile alla Fenomenologia dello Spirito* (Trento: Verifiche, 1980), p. 43.

7 Greek Thought in the *Early Theological Writings*

Much of what Hegel writes in the *Early Theological Writings* is critical of Christianity.¹ This he contrasts to the Greek religious experience. This is most evident in “The Tübingen Essay of 1793” in the notion of “folk-religion”. In “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” essay one finds Hegel’s account of where the Christian religion went wrong. One of the basic characteristics of the Greek religion in ancient Greece is that it was fully integrated into the life of the Greek people. This was not the case of the Christian religion in the late eighteenth century. Further, the social, political and cultural crisis of the time Hegel was writing contrasted sharply with the unity and harmony of the Greek world in antiquity. Starting with “The Tübingen Essay” on “Folk-Religion and Christianity” (“Volksreligion und Christentum”),² this chapter will consider the elements of Greek thought and experience that informed Hegel’s thought in the essays Nohl compiled as *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*.³

- 1 Characteristically, Kaufmann has said: “His essays, while not antireligious, consistently deprecate theology in any customary sense of the word.” Walter A. Kaufmann, “Hegel’s Early Antitheological Phase”, *The Philosophical Review* Vol. LXIII No. 63 (1954), p. 5.
- 2 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, in H. Nohl (ed.), *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1907), SS. 137–240; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793” (“Religion ist eine”) has been translated into English by H. S. Harris in an appendix to his *Hegel’s Development: Toward the Sunlight, 1770–1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 481–507. All quotes shall be from this translation, unless otherwise stated.
- 3 *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. H. Nohl (Tübingen: Mohr, 1907). An excellent study on the influence of Greek thought in Hegel’s philosophy is J. Glenn Gray’s, *Hegel and Greek Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). See section II on the young Hegel and the *Early Theological Writings*.

A *Volksreligion* is a public religion, in so far as it is a religion of a people. The ancient Greeks and the Romans had a folk-religion in this sense, but Hegel has the ancient Greek experience in mind. The idea of “God and immortality” constitutes “the conviction of a people”. In a folk-religion the feelings of the people spring from religious principles in an internal manner. This is not a religion where doctrine is imposed from above: “Religious ideas [*Ideen*] can make but little impression upon an oppressed spirit which has lost its youthful vigour under the burden of its chains and is beginning to grow old –.”⁴ Far from what would be expected – quite wrongly – a folk-religion is not an “objective religion”. It is Christianity which is an “objective religion”; the latter is “*fides quae creditor* ...”, while the powers that are operative in it are the “understanding” (“*der Verstand*”) and “memory” (“*das Gedächtnis*”)⁵ – “objective religion” is written in a book and is organized into a system. A folk-religion is a living religion; it is “subjective” in that it touches the feelings of the *Volk* and influences their actions. The lives of the ancient Greeks were influenced by their deities; they had deities of the home, deities of the sea, deities for the dead.⁶ As the famous classicist C. M. Bowra has put it:

Any approach to the Greek gods must be made not through dogmas and creeds, but through the actual views and practice of their worshippers.⁷

In fact, “In the vocabulary of the Greeks there was no word to convey the sense of religion per se; the words that were more akin in meaning were *ευσέβεια* [piety] and *θρησκεία* [religion] (but in the sense of ‘θρησκευτική λατρεία’ [‘religious worship’] in the singular and ‘θρησκευτικές τελετές’

4 “*Volksreligion und Christentum*”, S. 6; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 483.

5 “*Volksreligion und Christentum*”, S. 6; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 483.

6 Vide: “The most important characteristic of ancient Greek religion was belief in a mass of anthropomorphic deities, but also in personified physical powers and cultural phenomena, a belief which was, however, accompanied by the least possible dogmatism” (my translation). Α. Γ. Πουρνάρας (Γενικός Διευθυντής) και Π. Σουλτάνης (Διευθυντής Συντάξεως), *Ελλάδα: Το Παρελθόν και το Παρόν του Ελληνισμού*, Τόμος Α' (Αθήνα: Εκδοτικός Οργανισμός Πάπυρος, 2007), σελ. 512.

7 C. M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (London: Phoenix, 1994), p. 42.

['religious ceremonies'] in the plural).⁸ Religion in ancient Greece was intertwined with the life of the *polis*. It was not an organized system though. It lacked the structure and organization of religion in the modern world. It was rather a religious experience that the ancient Greeks lived in their city-state. Each city-state had a god that protected the city and to whom allegiance was owed. It was the god to whom the citizens would turn for help in times of crisis, disaster or difficulty – in times of an epidemic or war, for instance. Greek religion

begins at no fixed point and has roots which stretch indeterminately into an unchronicled past. It has no eminent prophet or law-giver who expounded the nature of the gods, no sacred books whose authority is final on doctrine or morals, no central organization for its hierarchy, no revealed cosmology, no conception of a dedicated religious life, no insistence on orthodoxy, no agreed eschatology, no accepted scheme of redemption.⁹

Surely, the Greeks had the gods of Olympus with Zeus presiding over them. Still, this was not an organized system of religion. These gods were related to each other by familial ties and each one of them had their own sphere of activity. Zeus was the father of the gods and humans alike. Hera was the queen of the gods and protected family life. Apollo was the god of light, Aphrodite represented physical desire and was born of the sea, while Poseidon was lord of the sea, and so forth. Much to our amazement, the gods resembled humans in that they appeared in human form and took part in activities just like human beings. They were different though and inhabited a world of their own. Unlike humans, they did not become old and exhibited vigour and beauty. This beauty was less the beauty of their body as portrayed in sculpture, but it was the beauty of their strength and determination. To be sure, in addition to the Olympian gods, there were also gods like Dionysus who was worshipped independently of the Olympic system. There were also deities like the satyrs, who had a human form with a tail of a horse or goat, and Pan, the goat-god, and cults like the Orphic.

8 Πουρνάρας και Σουλτάνης, *Ελλάδα: Το Παρελθόν και το Παρόν του Ελληνισμού*, Τόμος Α', σελ. p. 512.

9 Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, p. 42.

As Bowra says: "The Greek sense of the holy was based much less on a feeling of the goodness of the gods than on a devout respect for their incorruptible beauty and unfailing strength."¹⁰ The Greeks had public festivals when they celebrated the life of the city-state and this included religion. "The festivals expressed the social dimension of religion and attracted a mass of people [panegyreis]."¹¹ The Greeks sacrificed animals in the name of Gods: "... anyone could offer a sacrifice at any moment in time."¹² What is important in "subjective religion" is "whether, and to what extent, the mind [Gemüt] is disposed to let itself be controlled by religious motives".¹³ While "objective religion is abstraction", "subjective religion is the living book of nature, plants, insects, birds and beasts ...".¹⁴ Most importantly, "subjective religion" is the unity of life.

Education ("*Bildung*") played an important part in a folk-religion. In ancient Greece education instilled the public values of the city-state. Religion would not flourish had there not been "a cultivated plot" first.¹⁵ In "The Tübingen Essay of 1793" "Religion ist eine" Hegel maintains that "objective religion" is only one factor in "subjective religion".¹⁶ Yet when he refers to "religion" he abstains from all scientific or metaphysical knowledge about God, as this would amount to theology.¹⁷ For this reason he is not interested in an examination of religious doctrines; rather, he is concerned with the institutions that would make religion "enter into the web of human feelings".¹⁸ Hegel has this ideal of the Greek religion in mind when he writes that his object is how religion can "make a people better

10 *Ibid.* p. 45.

11 Πουρνάρας και Σουλτάνης, *Ελλάδα: Το Παρελθόν και το Παρόν του Ελληνισμού*, Τόμος Α', σελ., p. 514.

12 *Ibid.*

13 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 7; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", trans. Harris, *Hegel's Development*, p. 485.

14 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 7; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 484.

15 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 7; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 485.

16 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 8; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 486.

17 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 8; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", pp. 485–486.

18 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 8; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 486.

and happier”.¹⁹ The ancient Greeks saw in their gods perfection and they tried to emulate it. The gods incarnated virtue and vice. So the virtues and vices of the gods were part of their civic morality. Plato referred to the cardinal virtues of the Greek city-state when in his *Republic* he shows that the *polis* must exhibit wisdom, courage, self-discipline or temperance and justice.²⁰ The Athenians saw wisdom in the goddess Athena. What this means is that in their everyday life they could find each virtue in gods and their acts, which were examples (*παραδείγματα*). Their ethical code that was part of their civic code was exhibited in religion. This is encapsulated in the notion of a folk-religion (*Volksreligion*). In the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey* gods are portrayed as approving or disapproving of human behaviour. They did not only commit right acts; they also committed wrong acts. But the aim of Homer in portraying this was to convey a *moral* lesson. So the gods were not only models of virtue; they sometimes exhibited vice. For this reason there were intellectuals like Plato who disapproved of poetry that showed the failings of gods as bad for morality.²¹ When people committed worthy acts, they would gladly think that they enjoyed the respect and favour of the gods. As mentioned above, each city-state had the god that protected it. This god it honoured in public festivals like the Panathenaea in Athens. This means that there were local deities and, as in ancient Greece each city was also a state, these were national deities. At the same time, there were sacred places where there were shrines that were truly Hellenic, like Olympia and Delphi. The oracles that were given by Pithia, Apollo’s priestess, at Apollo’s shrine in Delphi enjoyed the respect of all the Greeks. Because Greek religion touched the hearts of the Greek people it was “subjective”. Hegel says of a folk-religion:

When it is subjective it does not manifest its presence merely in putting the hands together, bending the knees, and abasing the heart before that which is holy; rather it spreads out into every budding branch of human impulse ... and is everywhere active – though only indirectly – it is active *negatively*, so to speak, in the gay fulfillment of

19 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 8; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 486.

20 *Platonis Res Publica*, ed. S. Slings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 427c; σοφία (428b), ἀνδρεία (429a), σωφροσύνη (430c), δικαιοσύνη (432b).

21 *Ibid.* 391c.

human joys – or in the doing of high deeds and the exercise of the gentler virtues of benevolence [*Menschenliebe*] ... the expression of a human capacity, be it courage or compassion [*Menschlichkeit*], is like gaiety and enjoyment of life ...²²

To be sure, in ancient Greece like in later times the common people grounded the rightness of their actions on superstition in cases where prudence should have been their guide. It might well be that prudence was a main virtue of the Greeks, yet the man in the street acted from fear of God (or the gods). This is the nature of religion “among many sense-oriented [*sinnlich*] people”.²³ The “image” (“*Vorstellung*”) of God and of his relation to humans, as well as of his intervention with human affairs, is “that he acts according to the laws of human sensibility and only upon our sensible nature”. The “*concept*” of God and the act of devotion is rather “moralized”, as it implies “a higher order”.²⁴ It was surely a superstition that at a public festival deities were present. Perhaps it was also a superstition that the trees or waters were haunted by nymphs. And it was a superstition that the children had to suffer because of a misdeed of a parent – the idea of a hereditary curse, also found in tragedy (i.e. the hereditary curse of the house of Laius described by Sophocles in his tragedies). As well as believing that everything depends on the will of God, people in a folk religion also turn to him for advice about the future or for future-telling (oracles). Religion was so much connected with ethics, as good people were honoured and wicked were punished, the just deserved to be happy, while the unjust were doomed to unhappiness – “or at least this faith has its place beside the faith in destiny [*Schicksal*], and natural necessity ...”²⁵ Even intellectual men like Plato could narrate the “fate” of the souls in the nether world where just souls were rewarded and unjust souls punished. The punishment of the unjust souls resembles Hell.²⁶

22 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, SS. 8–9; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 486.

23 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 10; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 487.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Platonis Res Publica*, Book X. Regarding hell, recall Ardiaius’s punishment. At 616a we read that Ardiaius and others were thrown into the Tartarus.

In “The Tübingen Essay of 1793” Hegel maintained that religion could not be rationalized; or, rather, it should not be rationalized. Every effort of the “understanding” (*Verstand*) to explain a belief would “numb the heart”. The person who is able to question religious belief and calls “absurd” the belief of the heathens does not know what religion is.²⁷ The “understanding” (*Verstand*) damages religious belief and becomes a cold critic of religious feeling.²⁸ The “understanding” pertains to “objective religion”.²⁹ Moreover: “Enlightenment of the understanding makes us cleverer certainly, but not better.”³⁰ We saw above how morality was intertwined with religion in the world of the Greeks. The point that Hegel makes is that morality cannot be learned from a manual only. Nor can “enlightenment of the understanding” achieve this.³¹ The “understanding” wishes to “enlighten” the people. Says Hegel:

When we speak of “enlightening a people” that presupposes that errors are prevalent among them – popular prejudices – errors in the matter of religion ...³²

There are prejudices in a folk-religion; these prejudices are based on “sense and fancy [*Phantasie*]”. Even right ideas and beliefs are prejudices to the extent that they have not been subjected to the operations of the “understanding”. People have faith in them without having any knowledge of their grounds.³³ Not that they were not critics of the Greek religion from within Greek society. One line of criticism came from intellectuals who challenged the idea that gods were anthropomorphic. Xenophanes was one such critic; Plato was another; Aristotle was a third.³⁴ Aristotle believed in the existence of one God, who as pure mind was the prime mover of the

27 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 10; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 488.

28 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 11; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, pp. 488–489.

29 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 12; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 489.

30 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 12; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 490.

31 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 15. Cf. “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 493.

32 *Ibid.*

33 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, SS. 12–13; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, pp. 490–491.

34 See also Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, p. 60.

universe.³⁵ Another criticism was moral. Those critics were worried that the portrayal of bad acts and bad behaviour by Gods set a bad example to humans. Xenocrates and Plato were two such critics.³⁶ It seems that Greek society did not want these criticisms. Greek religion was so fully integrated into the life of the city-state and related to all aspects of the life of the people in the *polis* that the imagination of the common people mattered most for the sake of the unity of the *polis* and the happiness of the people. At least this is the ideal of the *Volksreligion* that Hegel offers in “The Tübingen Essay of 1793.” So there were prejudices in the religion of the Greeks. And there are prejudices in every folk-religion. The rationalization of those prejudices by the “understanding” kills “subjective religion”. It numbs the heart to its reception. This is the gist of that early essay. Prejudices can be of two sorts: “(a) actual errors”; “(b) beliefs which are actually true, but which are not grasped as truths, not known by reason simply but recognized by faith and taken on trust”.³⁷ Significantly, for Hegel, a folk-religion whose ideas are to influence the life of a people cannot be based on reason alone.³⁸ He believed that the religion of the ancient Greeks was the best example of a *Volksreligion*. Because Greek religion was not organized in the same way as Christianity for instance, it was able to accommodate new ideas and elements from time to time. It thus proved resistant to time. It exerted an influence on Greek people’s minds and lives. It rested on tradition – or, rather, there were different traditions at different places. For this reason religion took on a local character. These traditions were transmitted from one generation to the next. Religious practices were also transmitted in this way. This transmission from one generation to the next was enough to claim the people’s observance. Once one comes to realize that God is not really honoured in these practices or that what matters most is right action, one stops to observe them; these practices cease to have an influence

35 “Εἴτε δὴ νοῦς τοῦτο εἴτε ἄλλο τι ... τὸ θεϊότατον ...” Ἀριστοτέλους, *Ἠθικά Νικομάχεια* (Αθήνα: Πάπυρος, 1975) 1177 16–19 [Aristotelis, *Ethika Nicomacheia* (Athens: Papyrus, 1975) 1177 16–19].

36 See Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, pp. 61–62.

37 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 13; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 491.

38 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 14; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 492.

on him.³⁹ The problem is: how much rational argument can one use if religion is to survive? The less argument (*Räsonnement*) the better. The more one thinks of one's emotions, beliefs and common practices, these lose their "aura of sanctity".⁴⁰

To "enlightenment" Hegel contrasts "wisdom". Wisdom is neither "abstract argument" nor "science"; "it is an elevation of the soul". "Practical wisdom" speaks "from the fullness of the heart".⁴¹ "Enlightenment" can prove dangerous to a folk-religion; "it is usually sham wisdom" that shows vanity.⁴² The "enlightening understanding" is suitable for the examination of the doctrines of an "objective religion". It is of no use where education, great feelings, faith and noble dispositions are involved. And these are all elements of a folk-religion.⁴³ A folk-religion is not a "religion of the letter" ("*Buchstabenreligion*").⁴⁴ Importantly, Hegel distinguishes between "pure rational religion" and "fetish faith". A folk-religion should be closer to the former and as far away as possible from the latter. And, given that it is very difficult for a public religion to remove all possibility of the revival of fetish elements in it, the crucial question is how to create a folk-religion, so as, negatively, to eliminate the possibility of sticking to the letter and, positively, to be a "rational religion" ("*Vernunftreligion*").⁴⁵

In "The Tübingen Essay of 1793" Hegel also contrasts folk-religion to "religion within the bounds of reason", as Kant conceived it.⁴⁶ A folk-religion, being public, is also contrasted to "private religion".⁴⁷ Importantly, to be constituted:

39 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 14; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 492.

40 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 14; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 492.

41 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 15; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", pp. 492–493.

42 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 16; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", pp. 493–494.

43 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 16; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 494.

44 Hegel uses the term "*Buchstabenmensch*", "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 17.

45 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 17; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 495.

46 "Volksreligion und Christentum", SS. 17–19; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", pp. 495–497.

47 "Volksreligion und Christentum", SS. 19–20; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", pp. 497–499.

- I Its doctrines must be grounded on universal Reason.
- II Fancy, heart, and sensibility must not thereby go empty away.
- III ... all the needs of life – the public affairs of the State are tied in with it.⁴⁸

So far as I is concerned, the doctrines of a folk-religion should be based on the universal reason of humanity, whereby Hegel means human reason in accordance with the stage of a people at a given age. Only then can reason appeal to the feelings of the people and thereby influence morality.⁴⁹ This is a human religion and is intertwined with the civic life of the *polis*. For this reason these doctrines must be simple, so that they are understood by the common folk.⁵⁰ One of the distinctions Hegel often makes is that between “*Religion*” and “*Theologie*”. The doctrines of a folk-religion should not be “theological” in the sense that they offer the ground for debate among theologians. Thanks to their simplicity the doctrines of religion can exercise influence on the mind of the people and guide them in their everyday affairs. They can judge their own actions and one of the characteristics of the ancient Greeks was that they were proud of themselves and their actions. Simple doctrines “play a much greater part in the formation of the spirit of a people, than if the commandments are piled high ...”⁵¹ Simultaneously, these doctrines must be “humane” (“*menschlich*”), in the sense that they pertain to the “spiritual culture” and stage of morality that the people have reached. For this reason Greek religion was specific to the ancient Greeks. This ideal contrasts with that where “sublime Ideas” are possessed privately by a few who have acquired them over a long experience. One such idea is belief in a “clement Providence. Certainly, this is a tenet of the Christian faith.”⁵² The experience of the Greeks was different. On the one hand, they held the conviction that Gods showed favour to the good man and punished the trespasser (fear of Nemesis); on the other

48 “*Volksreligion und Christentum*”, S. 20; “*The Tübingen Essay of 1793*”, p. 499.

49 “*Volksreligion und Christentum*”, S. 21; “*The Tübingen Essay of 1793*”, pp. 499–500.

50 “*Volksreligion und Christentum*”, S. 21; “*The Tübingen Essay of 1793*”, p. 500.

51 “*Volksreligion und Christentum*”, S. 21; “*The Tübingen Essay of 1793*”, p. 500.

52 “*Volksreligion und Christentum*”, S. 22; “*The Tübingen Essay of 1793*”, p. 500.

hand, they accepted bad luck and misfortune as such – as bad luck and misfortune – and suffered all the sorrow that resulted therefrom. Their “fate” (“μοῖρα”) and their “necessary luck” (“ἀναγκαῖα τύχη”) was blind, but, as Greek tragedy shows, the Greeks submitted to it with resignation.⁵³ The doctrines that are founded on universal human reason inform the “spirit of the people” (“*Geist des Volks*”) in matters of great concern both directly and indirectly through ceremonies. Importantly, they do not form the particular preserve of priests, who as a caste seek power. In a *Volksreligion* like that of the Greeks there was certainly a Pythia but there was no established Church with a priestly class with a certain hierarchy like in Christianity. According to M. I. Finley,

The Greek word of “priest” is *hierous*, and the first and most striking thing about the word is that it was usually applied to what we should call laymen, to officials of the state whose function it was to carry out the rituals and who lacked any of the peculiar training, inspiration or sanctity one associates with priests in modern religions (or in many ancient ones).⁵⁴

As regards II, a folk-religion must affect the heart (“Herz”) and the imagination (“Phantasie”). It is crucial that, as a religion based on universal reason, it also enters the soul of the individual certainly but even more of the people. In Greece myths were interwoven in Greek religion from the beginning, so that the fancy was oriented from the start, whereas in Christianity there is more room for the fancy to play.⁵⁵ With regard to ceremonies, although they are essential to a folk-religion, it is important that they do not become its essence to the eyes of the populace (“dem Pöbel”).⁵⁶

Religion consists of three elements: (a) concepts, (b) essential practices, (c) ceremonies. An essential practice is sacrifices, which were often performed in classical Greece. There were two sorts of sacrifices: first, a person sacrificed animals as atonement, he or she offered indulgence fees, offerings were brought as commutations of a physical or moral punishment

53 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 23; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793” p. 501.

54 M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 48.

55 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, SS. 23–24; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 502.

56 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 24; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 502.

that was feared into a cash fine or as a way of gaining the favour of a God, who rewarded and punished humans accordingly. Simultaneously, Hegel notes that the idea of sacrifice has never existed in such a gross form, except perhaps in the Christian Church. But, again, one should not fail to notice the high feelings that accompany the act of sacrifice.⁵⁷ Second, there is the idea of sacrifice where there is also the sense of a higher Being (God) whom one believes has to thank for everything, show him one's goodwill, ask for his help with every undertaking and so forth. Here the idea of sacrifice is far removed from the idea of penance or the idea that through sacrifice Nemesis would be satisfied "and would surrender its claims on him for this reason, and suspend its laws by which moral equilibrium was maintained".⁵⁸

The "essential practices of religion" ought to emanate from the "spirit of the people"; otherwise they are without life, cold. As to the ceremonies of a folk-religion, they should avoid becoming a fetish worship, as they should not be performed mechanically, with no spirit; rather, their aim should be "to enhance devotion, and heighten pious feelings ...".⁵⁹

Regarding III, given that a folk-religion is characterized by the fact that all human needs and the public affairs of the *polis* are intertwined with it, there should not be a distinction between "life" ("*Leben*") and "doctrine" ("*Lehre*"). Otherwise, its form is defective.⁶⁰ In Greek religion this was possible as there was not an established Church to profess theological doctrine. So much of Greek religion was tied to mythology,⁶¹ while the myths were local and transmitted from generation to generation. So much of it was tradition that was transmitted by word of mouth and changed in accordance with the needs and stage of progress of the folk. Religious myths narrated the birth of the Gods and the genesis of the world from chaos, the deadly clashes of the gods that led to the dominion of Zeus, the father of the Mount Olympus. Other myths include the birth of goddess

57 "Volksreligion und Christentum", SS. 24–25; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 503.

58 "Volksreligion und Christentum", SS. 25–26; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 504.

59 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 26; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 504.

60 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 26; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 504.

61 On Greek mythology see Πουρνάρας και Σουλτάνης, *Ελλάδα: Το Παρελθόν και το Παρόν του Ελληνισμού*, Τόμος Α', σελ. 524 ff, σελ. 525–530.

Athena from the cranium of Zeus and those of Apollo and his sacred relations.⁶² Greek religion was also portrayed in poetry, tragedy, even comedy. Consider the cult of Demeter that was based in Eleusis, for instance. There was a myth connected to it: Demeter's daughter, Persephone, had been kidnapped by Hades and Demeter searched for her around the earth. Demeter arrived in Eleusis in disguise. "The myth 'explained' the ritual. It took the place of theology, so to speak, and it was accessible to everyone."⁶³ Hence the worship of the cult in Eleusis. Hegel went so far as to say that a religion that demands too much piety ("zu große frömmelnde Forderungen macht") makes this piety on people's part "hypocritical". If humans have to conceal their happiness and feelings before religion, if they have to be ashamed of them, then this form of religion is too depressing outwardly to dare demand of humans that they should give up their joys in its name. A folk religion "must abide in amity with all the emotions of life" ("Sie muß um alle Gefühle des Lebens freundlich machen"). It must be present everywhere, in all their business and affairs ("bei seinen Geschäften und Angelegenheiten").⁶⁴ In ancient Greece altars were not in temples; they were at home, in the assembly and other public spaces. Temples were mostly ornaments of the *polis*, erected to show the city's strength and magnificence. So when people were brought to sacrifice at the altar, it was not in a temple. Sacrifice was a ceremony that was practised privately (in the household) and more publicly in the field or assembly. There were gods of the dead and the Greeks sacrificed in the name of their deceased kin. The Greeks showed their respect to the patron god at religious festivals like the Panathenaea. The Olympic Games were founded in the honour of Zeus in 776 BC. The Bacchanalians were the religious festivals mostly associated with gaiety and joy. While, in referring to Plato's *Symposium*, Agathon held a festival for the gods the day after he had won the prize for tragedy.⁶⁵

62 Πουρνάρας, Α. Γ. και Σουλπάνης, *Ελλάδα: Το Παρελθόν και το Παρόν του Ελληνισμού*, Τόμος Α', σελ. 525–526.

63 Finley, *The Ancient Greeks*, p. 49.

64 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 26; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 505.

65 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 27; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 505.

The reference to the Greek political and cultural experience could not be clearer when Hegel says:

Folk-religion – which generates and nourishes noble dispositions [die große Gesinnungen] – goes hand in hand with freedom.⁶⁶

In the ancient *polis*, Athens in particular, freedom meant participation in public life. Athens was a direct democracy and citizens were free precisely because they took part in every aspect of political life.⁶⁷ Folk-religion, as a public religion, was fully integrated in the life of the *polis*.

By contrast to the religious experience of the ancient Greeks, Christianity tells humans to turn their gaze to the Heavens, a world beyond human reality. In this way, religion becomes alien (*fremd*) to people's everyday affairs. As Hegel says, in the Holy Communion one fears lest one catches from the common cup the venereal disease of the other. The implication here is that Christian faith does not bring people together but distances one from another. It also directs their gaze to a world that is irrelevant to their worldly existence and alien to their social and political life. Each individual will save their soul alone. How far this ideal is from that of the ancient Greeks! The "spirit of the people" (*Geist des Volks*) consists of its "history" (*Geschichte*), "religion" (*Religion*) and "level of political freedom" (*Grad der politischen Freiheit*); crucially, the foregoing are woven together in a way that they cannot be considered apart from one another. Folk-religion was part and parcel of the *polis*, its politics and culture. For this reason "to form the spirit of the people is in part ... a matter of the folk-religion, in part of political relations".⁶⁸

In less than two pages at the end of the essay on "Volksreligion und Christentum" Hegel describes the Greek spirit in a literary style. This "picture of a Genius among the peoples" (*das Bild eines Genius der Völker*) comes forth from the distant days of archaic and classical antiquity. Its needs

66 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 27; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 505.

67 On ancient Greek democracy, in contrast to twentieth-century democracy, see M. I. Finley, *Democracy: Ancient & Modern*, rev. edition (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

68 "Volksreligion und Christentum", S. 27; "The Tübingen Essay of 1793", p. 506.

binds it (i.e. the Greek spirit, this Genius) to “Mother Earth”, to a specific geographical area. The Greek spirit grew on the soil of a specific area called Hellas, cultivated it and beautified its life with feeling and imagination.

His servants were joy, gaiety, and grace; his soul filled with the consciousness of its power and freedom, his more serious companions at play [were] friendship and love ...⁶⁹

In his translation of the essay H. S. Harris includes a paragraph that had been deleted by Hegel and does not exist in Nohl's edition. There Hegel specifies that the father of the Greek genius is Time, that is to say, the specific age that the Greek spirit was born and flourished. Its mother is the Greek constitution and its wet-nurse religion.⁷⁰ From its father, that is, the specific circumstances of the age, the Greek spirit (“Genius”) acquired “faith in his fortune and pride in his deeds”. From its mother it was educated in political freedom (“His indulgent mother ... did not swaddle his delicate limbs in tight bands”). Finally, its wet-nurse, namely religion, filled its heart and imagination with “living images” (“lebendige Bilder”).⁷¹ Like the nurse who stayed in the family circle in a Greek household Greek religion remained the Greek spirit's life-long friend. The Greek spirit thanked religion for its grace and shared with her its joys. At the same time, religion did not offend its pride and dignity, although it enjoyed authority (hegemony).⁷² Religion's hegemony was grounded in “love” (“Liebe”) and “gratitude” (“Dankbarkeit”), though. But she taught the Greek spirit to accept fate (“Schicksal”).⁷³

The distinction between “subjective” and “objective” religion and the extent to which Greek religion is “subjective” also appears in the essay on “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion”. In Greek religion (“in der Religion der Griechen”), which as noted above is a folk-religion, “the moral commands of reason” are “subjective” (“subjektiv”) and, as such, are not imposed

69 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 28; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 506.

70 “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 506.

71 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 28.

72 The term Hegel uses is “Herrschaft”, “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 29.

73 “Volksreligion und Christentum”, S. 29; “The Tübingen Essay of 1793”, p. 507.

as “objective rules” with which the “understanding” has to deal (“wie Regeln des Verstandes”). By contrast, in the Christian religion the Church has taken moral commands as “objective” rather than “subjective”. In other words, moral commands are imposed on the believer in an external manner.⁷⁴ In the same essay we read that the Germans too once had a folk-religion:

The ancient Germans too, the Gauls, the Scandinavians, had their Valhalla (the home of their gods), as well as their heroes who lived in their songs, whose deeds inspired them in battle or filled their souls with great resolves on festal occasions; and they had their sacred groves where these deities drew nearer to them.⁷⁵

Of course, here too Hegel mentions once more the religion of the ancient Greeks, which was integrated into a polity, had its imagery and gods.⁷⁶ For Hegel, it was Christianity that “emptied Valhalla, felled the sacred groves” and “extirpated the national imagery as a shameful superstition”. In other words, as a result of Christianity and its “positivity”, the folk-religion of the ancient Germans died. In the next few pages we have a contrast of the ancient Greek experience with that of the late eighteenth-century German cultural, political and religious experience.⁷⁷ Consider the following:

The old German imagery has nothing in our day to connect or adapt itself to; it stands as cut off from the whole circle of our ideas, opinions, and beliefs, and is as strange to us as the imagery of Ossian or of India.⁷⁸

In the German world of the late eighteenth century class division was also reflected in culture. The imagery of the more educated classes was different

74 “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion”, S. 211; “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, p. 143.

75 “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion”, SS. 214–215; “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, p. 146.

76 “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion”, S. 214; “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, pp. 145–146.

77 “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion”, SS. 216–217; “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, pp. 147–149.

78 “Die Positivität der christlichen Religion”, S. 217; “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, p. 149.

from that of the common people; the common people could not understand the literature that the educated classes read; they could not grasp the characters of those authors that the more educated classes liked.

On the other hand, the Athenian citizen whose poverty deprived him of the chance to vote in the public assembly, or who even had to sell himself as a slave, still knew as well as Pericles and Alcibiades who Agamemnon and Oedipus were when Sophocles or Euripides brought them on the stage as noble types of beautiful and sublime manhood or when Phidias or Apelles exhibited them as pure models of physical beauty.⁷⁹

The attitude of the common people was different from that of the more educated in respect of religion as well. While the common folk clung to the letter ("they cling too rigidly to the material in question as to a matter of faith"), the more educated had a sense of uneasiness because of the way religious ideas and dogma had been impressed in their heads from their youth onwards. This compulsion had made them miss "that enjoyment of beauty which arises from the free play of our mental powers".⁸⁰

In the "Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal" ["The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate"] essay Greek thought appears in the notion of "punishment as fate". Here Hegel contrasts "punishment as fate" with legal punishment, that is, punishment as imposed by law. In the idea of "punishment as fate" there is no distinction between the law (the command) and the act. By contrast, punishment stands vis-à-vis the offender as "fate", an enemy that unites the "universal" with the "particular". "Fate is just the enemy, and man stands over against it as a power fighting against it."⁸¹ When a person is "in the toils of fate" he does not transgress a law. He injures "a united life", life in its totality. In other words, he does not rebel against a master. He has injured life. Hence an "alien" force ("ein Fremdes")

79 "Die Positivität der christlichen Religion", S. 216; "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", pp. 147–148.

80 "Die Positivität der christlichen Religion", S. 217; "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 148.

81 "Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal", S. 280; "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate", p. 229.

appears.⁸² Œdipus's "fate" was determined before his birth. According to an oracle, Laius, king of Thebes, was to be killed by his son. His son would then marry his wife, Jocasta. When Œdipus was born, Laius, lest the oracle prove right, took the child to Mount Cithaeron and left him there. The child was found by a shepherd and was given to a shepherd of the king of Corinth. This latter took him to the palace of the king of Corinth, who brought him up. When Œdipus grew up he went to Apollo's shrine in Delphi, where he was given the following oracle; he would kill his biological father and marry his biological mother. One day he met Laius and killed him while in self-defence. Not knowing that he was his biological father and unwilling to go back to Corinth, where the king had brought him up, he went to Thebes. The people there had been tyrannized for years by the Sphinx, whose enigma they could not solve. He solved the enigma and he was made king getting married to Jocasta (his biological mother). Œdipus had to confront his own "fate" when he realized how he had injured life. He had unknowingly killed his father, married his mother and had children with her. When he found this out he punished himself by blinding himself. His wife (and mother) killed herself. Œdipus said:

ἽΩ φῶς, τελευταῖόν σε προσβλέψαιμι νῦν,
ὅστις πέφασμαι φύς τ' ἀφ' ὧν οὐ χρῆν, ξὺν οἷς τ'
οὐ χρῆν ὁμιλῶν, οὗς τέ μ' οὐκ ἔδει κτανῶν.⁸³

[Oh light, let me look at you now for the last time,
I, who, appeared to have been born of those that I shouldn't, and
have slept with those that I shouldn't, and whom I killed when I ought not.]

For this reason the chorus says:

Τανῦν δ' ἀκούειν τίς ἀθλιώτερος;⁸⁴

[Now who does one hear is more miserable?]

82 "Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal", S. 280; "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate", p. 229.

83 Σοφοκλῆς, *Οἰδοίπους Τύραννος* (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1993) [Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Athens: Cactus Editions, 1993)], 1183–1185.

84 Σοφοκλῆς, *Οἰδοίπους Τύραννος* [*Oedipus Rex*], 1204.

“Destruction of life” (“Vernichtung des Lebens”) leads to a “separation” (“Trennung”), while the destruction means that “life” has created an “alien force” in itself.⁸⁵ By committing a crime, the trespasser finds himself fighting against an “alien” force that he himself has created. “Fate” is the result of the trespasser’s deed. We have this idea in Greek tragedy and Hegel has Sophoclean tragedy in mind here. “Reconciliation” (“Versöhnung”) with fate is more difficult than reconciliation with the law. Reconciliation with the law occurs when the criminal is sentenced in accordance with the law. “Reconciliation” with fate occurs after the separation with life is annihilated, that is to say, when life re-unites again. In Hegel’s words,

... the law is only the lack of life, defective life appearing as a power. And life can heal its wounds again; the severed, hostile life can return into itself again and annul the bungling achievement of a trespass, can annul the law and punishment.⁸⁶

Following the deed, the trespasser feels “the disruption of his own life” (“bad conscience”).⁸⁷ Thus, he suffers; this is his punishment. And it is a punishment that he has inflicted on himself; it has not been imposed by the judge or the law. He longs for what has been lost (i.e. the unity of life) and feels fear. This is not a fear of the law though. It is a fear of his “fate”; it is “fear of a separation, an awe of *one’s self*”. Says Hegel, “In fate ... the man recognizes his own life, and his supplication to it is not supplication to a lord but a reversion and an approach to himself”.⁸⁸ The person must realize this diremption, this “opposition” (“*Entgegensetzung*”) in order to re-unite himself with life. “It is in the fact that even the enemy is felt as life that there lies the possibility of reconciling fate.”⁸⁹ Hegel uses an

85 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 280; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 229.

86 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 281; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 230.

87 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 281; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 230.

88 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, SS. 281–282; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 231.

89 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 282; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 232.

important notion here, namely, the idea of “love”.⁹⁰ It is in “love” that fate is reconciled.⁹¹ “Love” is an intermediate state; it is the conscious effort to re-unite with the wholeness of life. “Love” leads one to reconciliation with “life”. This is a conception of “love” as reconcilability. Crucially, “the trespasser’s deed is no fragment; the action which issues from life, from the whole, also reveals the whole”.⁹² It should be obvious by now that fate applies more extensively than punishment. It is the result of “guilt without crime” and for this reason “it is stricter than punishment”.⁹³ “Guilt” is the result of action, while innocence would imply inaction in many cases.⁹⁴ This is where Hegel refers to Sophocles’s *Antigone*, the burial of her brother and her encounter with Creon.⁹⁵

In the “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal” [“The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”] essay, the young Hegel presents the religious teaching of Jesus in Platonic terms.⁹⁶ John says that Jesus knew what was in human nature; says Hegel “and the truest mirror of his beautiful faith in nature is his discourse at the sight of uncorrupted beings”.⁹⁷ Hegel is referring to a passage from Matthew’s Gospel. We read:

90 See also E. Sembou, “The Young Hegel on ‘Life’ and ‘Love’”, *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, Double Issue, Nos 53–54 (2006), pp. 81–106.

91 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 283; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 232.

92 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 283; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 232.

93 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 283; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 232.

94 Later in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* Hegel will say “Innocence ... is merely non-action.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), S. 308; quoted from *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 282.

95 Sophocles, “Antigone”, in *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*, Vol. I, ed. L. Campbell, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879). See also E. Sembou, “Antigone and Lysistrata in G. W. F. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*”, *Jahrbuch für Hegelforschung* Vols 8–9 (2002–2003), SS. 31–52.

96 See also Sembou, “The Young Hegel on ‘Life’ and ‘Love’”, pp. 86–87.

97 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 315; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 269.

If ye do not become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. He who is the most childlike is the greatest in heaven. Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. Whoever is capable of sensing in the child the child's pure life, of recognizing the holiness of the child's nature, he sensed my essence. Whoso shall sully this holy purity, it were better for him that a millstone were hung round his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea. [...] Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my father in heaven.⁹⁸

Hegel explains that the “angels” of the children are not real children – they are not “objective beings”. What Hegel means by angels “in the sight of God” is an immediate unity with God. This immediate, unreflective, unity with God is lost when it is represented in the imagination as angels who are children. According to Hegel, in order to articulate the true essence of the divine (“pure life”), Plato separated the immortal (“das reine Lebendige”) from the mortal (“das Beschränkte”) “by a difference of time” (“durch der Verschiedenheit der Zeit”). Pure spirits have lived with and contemplated the divine before incarnation and their subsequent life on earth.⁹⁹ Children before birth are in oneness with God, although they are unaware of this. This *immediate* unity with God is lost once the child is born.

There is a clear reference to Plato's *Phaedrus* here, in particular to Plato's picturesque story of the souls flying aloft in the heavens before entering a human body by birth. The soul resembles a winged charioteer and his team. The charioteers and the horses of the gods are good, but this is not always the case with the rest whose nature is mixed. The charioteer of these latter drives two horses, one of which is good and the other bad.¹⁰⁰ When

98 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 315; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, p. 269.

99 “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, S. 315; “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”, pp. 269–270.

100 Plato, “Φαῖδρος” [*Phaedrus*], 246a–b. The following edition has been used: Plato, “Φαῖδρος” [*Phaedrus*], in *Platonis Opera*, Vol. III, with critical notes by J. Burnet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946, c. 1901), III. pp. 227–279.

complete and winged, every soul flies up and governs the *cosmos*; when it loses its wings, it falls and acquires an earthly body.¹⁰¹

As Hegel says,

The opposition of seer and seen, i.e., of subject and object, disappears in the seeing itself. Their difference is only a possibility of separation.¹⁰²

But, as there is a possibility of separation, there is likewise a possibility of a return to oneness. A person (a mortal being) can return to the original unity with God by regaining his innocence and childlike nature. Herein lies Hegel's version of Plato's theory of recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*).¹⁰³

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the elements of Greek thought that we find in Hegel's *Theologische Jugendschriften*. First, in "The Tübingen Essay of 1793" we find the idea of folk-religion, that is, the notion of a public religion, inasmuch as it is a religion of a people. This religion is intertwined with the life of the *polis*; lacking the organization of religion in the modern world, it is rather the religious experience of the ancient Greeks. A folk-religion is a living religion; it is "subjective" in that it touches the feelings of the people and directs their behaviour. In the "Die Positivität der christlichen Religion" ["The Positivity of the Christian Religion"] essay we read that the Germans too once had a folk religion.¹⁰⁴ Second, in the "Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal" ["The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate"] essay we encounter the notion of "punishment as fate". In the idea

101 *Ibid.* 246b–d.

102 "Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal", S. 316; "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate", p. 270.

103 Cf. Sembou, "The Young Hegel on 'Life' and 'Love'", p. 87.

104 "Die Positivität der christlichen Religion", SS. 214–215; "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", p. 146.

of “punishment as fate” there is no distinction between the command and the act. By contrast, punishment stands vis-à-vis the offender as “fate”, a foe that unites the “universal” and “particular”. A person caught “in the toils of fate” has injured a “united life”, that is, life in its totality. A perfect example is *Cedipus Rex*.¹⁰⁵ Crucially, the field of applicability of fate is far more extensive than that of punishment. It affects life in its totality. Fate is the result of “guilt without crime”; it is rather the result of action, where innocence would simply be inaction. This we see in Sophocles’s tragedy *Antigone*, where we witness the burial of her brother and her encounter with Creon. Third, in the same essay we encounter Platonism in the religious teaching of Jesus. The young Hegel uses Platonic terms in order to explicate the true essence of the divine (“pure life”). Pure spirits have lived with and contemplated the divine before incarnation. A human being is in oneness with God before birth. This immediate unity is lost once the person is born. Plato’s Theory of Forms and the story of the souls flying aloft in the heavens before incarnation is clear, as is Plato’s theory of *anamnesis*.¹⁰⁶

105 See Sophocles’s tragedy under this title.

106 Vide Plato’s “*Φαίδρος*” [*Phaedrus*].

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